

**Sermon notes** March 1, 2020 (First Sunday of Lent) **Focus** Be *that person* [All readings](#)

**Lent** - It's a time set aside for reflection and examination. It's a time to "give up" something. You simplify your days in order to serve others. In addition, Lent is a good testing lab to try out new approaches for loving God and others.

**The temptation story of Jesus is a promise.** Jesus is the bearer of a promise made at baptism (this is my beloved) and he is not going to let anyone convince him otherwise while in the desert (he lives on every word that comes from God). He is unwavering even in stress and hunger. Jesus goes into the arid place knowing he's loved and he leaves the desert knowing he is loved. *The devil wanted him to forget that.* The devil wanted Jesus to act for him, dance for him, and hand over his God-given authority. Jesus didn't fall for it and we don't have to either.

**This is not about you!** It's very *unhelpful* for us to think that we are being like Jesus when we give up scotch and feel good about our sacrifice. The story is a clash of worlds. The devil (or however you imagine evil in the world) is looking for an inroad to convince Jesus that he needs help from the dark side. If Jesus would just dance for the devil, the devil will help him out.

Where we place ourselves in the story is super important. The real temptation for us is to believe and act like we are not loved completely by God. You can set up a swearing jar during Lent — that's great, but it's not the main thing. We have supreme value just because we are made by God. Practices clarifying our unconditional value are the main thrust of Lent. We have unequivocal beauty and much woe and sin springs from forgetting this.

The devil is not trying to get Jesus to do something sinful, but to get him to lie to himself. The devil's ultimate victory would be to get Jesus to forget who he is as God's beloved. Jesus doesn't fall for it. *That is a superpower we have too.*

**You can** speak kindly, knowing you don't need to justify or defend yourself to anyone. "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." **You can** get out of the way to let the Holy Spirit work through you. 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' **You can** make decisions based on God's love 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only God.'"

**You can't** pray a prayer that will make you more beloved by God than you already are. **You can't** abstain your way to righteousness. No number of caffeine headaches will make more righteous before God. **You can't** cross a justice finish line. There is no end to serving the marginalized where you will finally get an activist star.

So give up something and take something on. Speak holy words, trust holy providence. Know God built you lovely.

**Be that person** I can't believe the Parkland shooting was on Ash Wednesday two years ago. Many of you were deeply encouraged by the passion and bravery of those youth - so was I. Many were so hopeful that the Parkland kids were going to save us from ourselves. That was partially misplaced. You only need to look at what has happened to them to see the profound trauma they experience and the burden we placed on them.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/24/us/parkland-suicide-marjory-stoneman-douglas.html> It is not just the youth who have a call to change the systems of violence. We all do. If we idolize the righteousness of the youth who are brave, then we give ourselves a pass from stepping up ourselves.

I have the people of Molson Coors on my mind - they had their own senseless Ash Wednesday tragedy a few days ago.. I offer the same reflection now, that I offered two years ago. This is a post is from a friend of mine — who was a high school principal in Fort Worth (near Dallas, TX). It seems as relevant now as it did then. My friend put the pain and struggle to heal well - post Parkland. Days after the shooting he wrote—

*“Are we going to do anything?” This was the first question I was asked as I walked the halls this morning at my school. And my answer? “No, we are not.” And now I am trying to sit at my desk and do some work and not cry. We do active shooter drills at my school. Practice having kids huddle in fear for their lives.*

*“Are we going to do anything?” What can we do? Thoughts and prayers? Politicize the event to discuss gun laws? Hold a school assembly and get the counselors involved? No, we are not. the kids don't care. They are numb.*

*“Are we going to do anything?” Yeah. I'm going to keep coming to school and try to be **THAT** person for my kiddos, come home and be dad for my own kids, and keep moving forward. School shootings? I have my vote, and I'll use it. So after getting teared up three times at school today (not in front of kids luckily) I'm spent. Just fatigued to the bone. And tomorrow I will get into saddle up and do it again. We still have kids to teach and take care of. That never seems to change.*

Today, ask for the strength to be *that* person. Our engagement is way more necessary than giving up chocolate. You can give up scotch as a lab experiment, and see if it helps you find a room for deeper compassion. If not raise, your glass.

Love God, serve God, and know you are beautiful just because you were made by God and I have been praying for us to be **that** person in Lent as well as all year.

**Todd**