

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 4:1-11

Sermon: Defining Moments: Overcoming Temptation by Pastor Jenn

Defining Moments. We all experience them, those times that you are forced to make a decision that will help define who you are. It could be as simple as choosing Coca Cola or Pepsi; Ford or Chevy; Big Mac or Whopper. Or it could be as serious as choosing a political party to align with; what field to work in; where to reside or retire. And while defining moments are based on our own decisions, Defining Moments tell others who you are.

Our faith journeys lead us to defining moments as well. During this season of Lent as Jesus journeys to the cross, he will face many defining moments that tell people who he is and what he is about. We will also study the people he ministers to and observe their defining moments to be his followers. I am going to propose that as we study these texts and understand the defining moments for Jesus and his disciples, that these stories will encourage our own identities to become followers of Christ. This week we start with: The first defining moment Jesus faces is how does he handle temptation?

Now prior to this passage Jesus was baptized, and upon doing so, Matthew tells us that as he came up from the water, the heavens opened up, the Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove, ¹⁷*And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'* (Matthew 3:17) Jesus was claimed by God, publicly. Now Jesus goes on a fast, to prepare himself for the ministry he is called to, being the Son of God. However, temptations were given by Satan during this fast. You heard three were offered: Jesus could receive instant gratification with bread. He was hungry after all. He could test God, by throwing himself off a building. And he could be tempted for world power. Yet Jesus refused all that. He knew these were defining moments for him as God's beloved. So how did he overcome them? We heard the reasoning he gave: V4 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' Quoting Deuteronomy 4:2 V 7 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Quoting Deuteronomy 6:16 V 10 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'" Deuteronomy 6:13 It's obvious Jesus knew the scriptures, Scriptures of what it means to be dedicated to God's will. A will that we read in *Proverbs 3:5-6* *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.* Jesus understood Scripture and he understood God's will to lead him in the right way.

But there is something else that helped Jesus in this defining moment. *He knew he was God's Beloved.* Friends, the root of all temptation is to forget who we are. And each and every day can and may bring a test of our identities. Testing who we are as a student, a spouse, a parent, a co-worker, a peer. However, the more we say no to the things that pull us away from who we are, the more of a foundation we hold for those defining moments. So we say no to that one more drink, or else it could lead to being defined as alcoholic. We don't "forget" to scan an item at the store or else we will be defined as a thief. And we don't cheat. It's the same with our faith. In 2 Corinthians 4:8-10 Paul writes to Christians being persecuted, ⁸*We have troubles all around us, but we are not defeated. We often don't know what to do, but we don't give up.* ⁹*We are persecuted, but God does not leave us. We are hurt sometimes, but we are not destroyed.* ¹⁰*So we constantly experience the death of Jesus in our own bodies, but this is so that the life of Jesus can also be seen in our bodies. His message:* The more we say no to temptation to draw away from God, the more we say yes to God and being God's by following Jesus Christ.

So, just like Jesus, we will not focus on satisfying our temporary desires, because we do not live on bread alone, we also live spiritually and emotionally, not just physically. And just like Jesus, we will not test God when things start to get difficult. Instead, we will know God holds us in the palm of God's hand no matter the trial we face. And just like Jesus, we will not succumb to the ways of the world but know that our kingdom is not of this world, and strive to share it with our words, our actions, our deeds.

This is the first Sunday of Lent, a time when we walk with Jesus to the cross, knowing that after the cross brings new life, and so I invite you to consider that the next time you may face temptation, that is one of those defining moments to draw you away from God and God's will, may you instead draw closer to God with your heart, mind, soul, and strength. For as you do, just like Jesus, you will be reminded that you are a beloved child of God's.