

"Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days"

words by Claudia F. Hernaman, UMH 269

vs. 3

"As thou dost hunger bear, and thirst, so teach us, gracious Lord, to die to self, and chiefly live by thy most holy word."



Wilderness at Wadi Qelt near Jericho where Jesus was tempted. Picture by Tina Whitehead

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

(Matthew 4:1)

Temptation and sin. Perhaps 'sin' is not a word or concept that we use much today, but I would suspect that we are all familiar with 'temptation.' Television ads constantly bombard us with products to buy that guarantee us a better quality of life; brightly packaged foods lure us away from our resolutions to follow a diet or a more healthy lifestyle. 'Opportunities' to get ahead, to save money, might tempt us to make decisions that may not reflect our values. Temptation is everywhere!

Some of the temptations we face might seem trivial (Should I have another cookie even though I know it is not healthy?). But other temptations can be life changing, for ourselves and for others. What does scripture teach us about dealing with temptation?

In today's scripture passages, we see two examples of temptation, one in a garden and the other in the wilderness. In one, the tempter wins out; in the other, the one tempted resists. The temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden is somewhat troubling. It seems innocent; they're tempted to be like God, to know good from evil, to gain wisdom. What could be wrong with that? In the wilderness, Jesus has been fasting for 40 days. He must be hungry, probably wondering how long this will last, or even if he will ever leave the desert. He is tempted with food and with power. But he does not give in.

I wonder if his response was as easy as it seems in Matthew's account. Was there anguish? Did he wrestle with whether or not to give in? It does not seem so here, but then I think of the Garden of Gethsemane and I read of sweating drops of blood as he struggles with, "Let this cup pass from me."

And then I think of some of the temptations here in Palestine. A son is in prison and a father is tempted to betray friends and family in order to obtain his release. A wife has cancer and a husband is tempted to give evidence against neighbors in order to get a permit for her to be able to go a hospital and have needed

treatment. Temptation. Anguish. What choice would you make?

And another temptation that is everywhere present here. The temptation to despair, the temptation to lose hope in the face of everyday realities under occupation.

For me, it is important to always remember that Jesus was fully human. The anguish that we face, the choices that we are confronted with, were not unfamiliar to him. He also struggled with temptation, but he trusted in God who is faithful, whose love is unfailing, who forgives us when we fall. Or, as the writer of Psalm 32 states, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go, I will counsel you with my loving eye on you" (vs. 8). And in verse 10, "...the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him."

Prayer: Lord, we all know what it is like to be tempted. Sometimes we feel helpless in the face of decisions that need to be made, other times we are just weak. We thank you that your loving presence surrounds us and gives us hope. May we look to you in all the decision that we make. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Devotion written by Tina Whitehead, United Methodist volunteer in Palestine and Israel.