

“Decisive Choices: The Path of Jesus”

Sermon for the First Sunday of Lent (February 22, 2026)

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The three scripture readings we heard today focused on the works of the Devil or Satanic Forces. While engaging with the temptations of the Devil, it indirectly asks us how to make choices decisively when we are faced with the Devil’s instructions. In Genesis, one could side with Adam, who followed Eve’s instruction, who, in turn, listened to the snake that crept into their space stealthily. In Paul’s epistle to the Romans, we must choose whether to serve Adam, and therefore sin, or to serve Christ, the second Adam, and therefore free ourselves from sin. In the Gospel reading, we could be impressed by the Devil's offers, which were all lucrative, or we could overcome the Devil's temptations as Christ decisively overcame them. One way or another, as a human being, one has to make clear-cut choices.

Before we decide which way to go, I want to ask the questions: why and how the Devil comes into our lives. What are the acts of the Devil called? Can we call it evil or sin? Why is evil in the world if God is all-powerful and all good? What is our understanding of evil? Evil is anything that is opposed to the will of God. Evil does not originate from God. Scripture states that God’s creation is “very good” (Genesis 1:31), so evil is not a substance created by God. Evil and God did not exist from the beginning. Only God exists from the very beginning. The early church theologian St. Augustine said, “The free choice of the will is the reason why we do wrong.” Evil came into being because of human will. Theologically, “evil” is associated with “sin.” Sin is the primary means by which evil enters human life. Through the misuse of human freedom, individuals and communities participate in evil, producing suffering, injustice, and broken

relationships. The Bible says that our sin originated in one man, Adam, because of the free exercise of his will. Sin is the result of the first sin of Adam, and it is committed anew by each person. Sin is NOT what God intends for us: it represents our worst selves and the worst of human society. It is our decision that causes evil or sin. Now, how are we going to make a decisive choice, especially during the Lenten season, when we are expected to engage in moments of self-reflection to avoid evil and sin?

In a democratic country like the US, everyone has the freedom to choose. It is necessary to make decisions about matters related to our lifestyle and values, and to derive meaning and interpret ideas. But our choices and exercise of free will go with our faith. We can choose something that influences our lives with goodness, Godliness, and that which overcomes all temptations of earthly things that cause sin, which leads to all human suffering.

Lent provides us with a season of contemplation, encouraging us to focus on this added dimension in our lives. We began the experience last Wednesday, when we felt the reality of our frailty by having ash placed upon our foreheads – *"remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return"* – simple words with profound resonance. Adam and Eve's experience with that famous apple ensures that eternal fragility and mortality. The next six weeks or so should be dominated by holiness, self-examination, repentance, prayer, fasting, self-denial, reading, and meditating – all of that alongside living and working in the real world! This is the task list before us. But how much do we take amidst our diaries filled with other priorities and appointments? Somehow, we have to fit "God" into all that. So, what can Lent do for us, and what images can we pull out from today's scripture that might help us to journey through this season?

The imagery that would help us to look back and realize our right choice before us is the image of Christ, who chased away all the distractions posed by Satan. The Gospel reading makes plain

that distractions surround us. We are distracted by extremely tempting enticements. Who would not want a delicious meal when hungry; who would not want to be immune from the pitfalls of life; who would not want to ever be in need? Most of us, including me, are tempted to choose these things in our lives. We never realize that these are all the Devil's offerings to us and are the attractive fruits that the reptile cunningly offers from life's tree. In one way or another, we are all "Adams" and "Eves" when it comes to choosing something that satisfies our cravings.

Let us look into the imagery of Christ. Christ stayed focused. He was focused upon that which lay at His heart and at the very core of His being, namely, the "God" element that stays within His life. The Devil tempted him to go for power in different forms. The first temptation to turn the stones into bread was to set aside the laws of nature and display divine omnipotence. It is a temptation to work miracles, not in the sense in which Jesus allowed himself to defy the law in the name of divine compassion. The next was the temptation to spectacle. The world wants heroism and a thirst to exhibit power. Instead of feeling invisible and lost among the billions, there is a tendency to follow the cult of celebrity. Today's heroes do not have to jump off towers. They have only to appear tantalizingly flashy and sexy. They want media attention to exhibit before the voiceless and the vulnerable. And at last, there comes the temptation to political power. Most people in today's world have a craving for it, directly or indirectly. The Devil could not succeed against Jesus as he had against Adam.

How about the apples that appear before us in our daily lives today? Do we beware that beneath these shiny apples, there are maggots in their inner core? A 'Holy Lent' involves self-examination: a careful look at ourselves, a careful look to ensure the influences we are taking in are of goodness and value, a careful look to prevent a reckless choice. We are, at the end of the day, the guardians of our own destiny – we can indeed choose God's guiding principles, which

He provides an ample supply of. Are we ready to choose them? We may fail many times in our choices. But that is human. However, our bad choices do not exclude us forever. We learn to know the difference, we realize the consequences of the choices we made, and we seek to amend ourselves in this Lenten season. If we resolutely change our ways, thoughts, and attitudes, then it is true repentance. That is why we are asked to go for self-examination during this season. This season provides us with enough time to become a refreshed Adam and to appear alongside Christ at His triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. This is the call given to us to be a witness in the world to live a life that manifests the life of Jesus in the world. May God help us choose any one method that provides the key to becoming a witness with focus and without distraction: prayer, reading and meditating, fasting, self-denial, and a little bit of sacrifice that focuses on purifying our souls and becoming better. The less we are distracted, the more we can become Christ-like. We know the invitation is open and that we can do it. But we need to decisively choose the path of Christ. May God help us during this Lenten season to make that decision. Amen