

HOMILY for Scout Sunday
March 5, 2017
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Matthew 4:1-11
Rev. Stephanie Ryder

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Does anyone here play soccer?

A newspaper reported about a big high school soccer game between Wheaton and Waubonsie Valley. Waubonsie was the bigger school, and its team had a much better record. Late in the game, Waubonsie Valley took a 3-2 lead.

As the clock ticked toward the end of the game, Waubonsie Valley took another shot on the Wheaton goal. The goalie stopped the ball, then threw it to his team's star player, Rob, a senior, who was the school's all-time top scorer.

Rob moved the ball past the defenders until the goal was within his range. He faked the goalkeeper and kicked the ball into the goal tying the game.

The Wheaton fans went crazy and erupted in cheers. Rob's goal had saved his team from defeat!

But Rob had noticed something—the clock on the scoreboard behind the goal had ticked down to zero before he kicked the ball. After consulting with the referee, who had not noticed that time had expired, Rob told his coaches that Waubonsie Valley actually earned the victory. They agreed and told the opposing coach that his team actually won the game. (I know this sounds a bit like something that happened at the Academy Awards recently, but back to the soccer game.)

When interviewed later, Rob said he saw the situation as an opportunity, and not a tough decision at all. He told a reporter, "I'm thankful every time I have an opportunity to make the right choice. For a person to know what is right, and then not to do it, that's going down the wrong path and eventually leads to misery and unhappiness. To have won the game was not as important as doing the right thing. Every time I'm lucky enough to be given the opportunity to do right, I don't pass it up." Wow, what a wise, wise boy.

The Bible passages read today are stories about temptation, and about making good choices. In the passage about Adam and Eve, the crafty serpent tempts the woman to eat the fruit from the tree that God had warned her not to eat. Eve tells the serpent that God said not to eat it or you will die. "You won't die!" the serpent says, and convinces Eve to eat the fruit. She shares it with Adam, and their decisions change their lives and the course of humanity. Instead of being free, Adam and Eve, and maybe all of us now, want to hide, from each other and from God.

Temptation happens to every one of us all the time. It could be those around us who try to convince us to do things we know are not right, like the serpent did with Eve, or it could be a voice inside our own heads that tries to trick and deceive us. Maybe the soccer player, Rob, heard a voice in his head that said, "No one saw the clock! Don't say a word! You just saved the team from a loss!" But instead, he chose to be honest, and to do what he knew was right.

Sometimes, it takes us awhile to catch on, and we struggle with making the right choice. I remember when my 2 sons were little, before they became cub scouts, I was in a rock band. And the band rehearsed in San Francisco late at night. So I would put the boys to bed, dress up in my rock star clothes, and then go out in the city to rehearse. My husband didn't like this so much. The band was exciting, and colorful and flashy and loud and very edgy. But it was all about me, and not at all about my family and what they needed.

A job came up at my church to be a musician there. I knew what God wanted me to do, and I decided to take the church job and quit the band. I'm not saying being in a band is bad; it's not. It just wasn't right for me and my family at that time in my life. Thankfully, God helped me to realize it before it was too late.

The devil destroys, and God builds. I don't necessarily think of the devil as a beast with red horns, no more than I think that God is an old man with a white beard in the sky. Rather, I think of the devil as the power of destruction, and God as the power of love.

This week, there was a man, Stewart, who was given some unfortunate news at work, that some important packages that were supposed to be sent last month overseas hadn't actually left the warehouse yet. Stewart's normal reaction would be to become upset, to rage and holler, blame somebody, and demand immediate attention to the matter.

Instead, thinking about what God would want him to do, he stayed calm, prayed about the situation, and trusted that God would help him. Stewart said that when he did this, angels appeared all around him. These were not winged and haloed creatures flying around, but people, people that were like angels who came to help him.

This is what happens for Jesus in the second story read today, when Jesus is in the wilderness with the devil. Jesus is tempted to side with the devil, to go against what he knows God wants him to do, and Jesus chooses to side with God. He remembers God's Word, what God wants him to do, and this keeps him strong. And Scripture says that angels then come to wait on him.

Ok, one more sports story. Does anyone here play football?

Running back Rashaan Salaam won the Heisman trophy in 1995 for his outstanding rushing career in college. In his rookie year with the Chicago Bears, the pros uncovered a weakness in Salaam's game: he was prone to fumble. Although he led the Bears in rushing during his rookie season, he coughed up the ball nine times. I'm told this is the worst thing to do in football – to fumble.

The coaches devised a practice drill to try to correct the problem. They tied a long strap around a football. Rashaan ran with that ball clutched against his chest,

another Bear ran behind him yanking on the other end of the strap. Rashaan had to squeeze the ball with all his might to keep from losing it.

This is like what Jesus does this when he is tempted in the wilderness by the devil to do the things he knows aren't right. Jesus' power is in his ability to hold on to the ball and not lose it. He remembers God's word, follows it, and relies on it in times of temptation. And then the angels come and wait on him, maybe like the players coming and jumping on Rashaan in celebration when he runs into the endzone with the ball.

The Scouts practice doing good deeds and being of service, and this is what God asks of us, and what God wants us to do. By practicing this, scouts are developing good habits that will serve them well in tempting times.

The good news today is that we are given guidance through God's word in the Bible and in the Scout Law which we will recite together later in the service. We can rely on these words to keep us on the right track, making healthy and honorable decisions that are pleasing to God, like Rob, Stewart and like Jesus.

Thanks be to God!