

"Be Mine!"

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7 & **Matthew 4:1-11**

February 13, 2005

Well, my friends - we have before us at least 3 different focuses - each of which would be good to spend some time with today. First - we have entered into the Lenten season. Lent - what a great season - a season of reflection and renewal of our relationship with our God. Often it is a time when we 'give up something' [at least in theory so that we better focus on building on our relationship with God]. It makes me think of a story about a pastor that was working in an inner city. He happened to be walking down an alley one evening on his way home when a young man came down the alley behind him and poked a knife against his back. "Give me your money," the young man said. The pastor opened his jacket and reached into an inner pocket to remove his wallet, exposing his clerical collar. "Oh, I'm sorry," said the young man, "I didn't see your collar. I don't want YOUR money." Relieved yet still trembling from the scare, the pastor pulled out a cigar that he had received from a new father and offered it to the 'would be' thief. "Here," he said. "Have a cigar." "Oh, no, I can't do that," the young man replied, "I gave them up for Lent."

How will you build on your relationship with God during this Lenten season?

Second - Tomorrow is Valentine's Day. There are so many great themes that a pastor could latch on to with that one. What a great 'holiday'. I always enjoy being reminded of Bishop Valentine, the man for whom the day was named. He was a man who was so committed both to love and marriage [as well as to God] that he was compelled to disobey the orders of Emperor Claudius II who had forbidden anyone to perform marriages. The emperor's reasoning was that he did not want young men to have any attachments so that they would be more willing to go to war. Bishop Valentine disobeyed the new law and continued to perform weddings and was arrested. He was given a chance to 'repent' and become an Emperor worshiper but he would not give up His commitment to God. For this commitment to marriage and to God, he was beheaded. Would that we were all that committed to love and to God. It is a great story behind this Valentines Day ahead of us. And like the season of Lent itself, Valentines Day could be seen as a call to renew our commitment both to God and to those we love the most. Unfortunately all of that often gets lost in the commercial, 'romance focused' quality of the day. I remember having read once that it is the one day of the year that men face with the most fear and trepidation. Actually, even though it is such a wonderful thought, I believe that almost everyone, at one time or another in their lives, has faced that day with a bit of trembling. I have read plenty of stories of children who have been faced with the dreaded moment when they have opened their box of Valentines cards with a great deal of fear because they did

not know if they were going to get any. Some did not. We all want and need to be loved. We all want someone to do something to say "Be Mine".

And finally, {don't take that to mean that the sermon is almost over - this is just the 3rd option of things to focus on} - finally - or thirdly, there is the scriptural focus on temptation.

Jesus is led by the spirit into the wilderness. He has just come up out of the waters of baptism and has heard the affirming word of God that told Him that He was God's beloved Son. He has to have been strengthened by that assurance. But the temptation that He would face was serious indeed. Fasting for 40 days, He is invited to use His power to provide Himself with some bread. Struggling with questions as to what His mission in life was to be and how to accomplish it He is invited to take a short cut through giving in to the tempter - short cut the process by using power and fame to make Him popular rather than going the route of sacrifice.

Adam and Eve faced the 'tempter' in the garden. The temptation was so very simple. It came down to a simple question. Do you believe and trust God – or will you trust the serpent?

Whether we talk about Adam and Eve or the temptation of Jesus - it all seems so exotic - great story lines. And we can dismiss them because we know that we will never be in a garden talking to a snake about which trees to eat from. And we will never be fasting in a wilderness for 40 days before we are given the options of turning stones into bread. But the fact is that we face the same kinds of temptations every day. The temptation that we face is the Lenten challenge - will we walk with God? The temptation we face is a Valentine's Day temptation where we have received two cards - both cards have the same plea - two words – "Be Mine". One card is signed, "God". The other - "Satan". Whose invitation will you accept. Will you trust and walk with God or will you walk away from God?

I know that the temptations of Jesus in our Gospel text have been categorized / classified and picked apart in many different ways. Some say that these temptation form the basis of all temptation as though there are really only three kinds of temptation. But I began to think that maybe it is not even that complicated. I don't know if it is true or not - I would be interested in knowing what you think - but it struck me this week that maybe all temptation could easily be categorized as the call to "Be Mine". It seems that everything is out there with a "Be Mine!" sign on it. Everything is vying for our attention - everything is looking for our love and acceptance. God sends a Valentine card asking us to be His - it is filled with words like love, forgiveness, grace and peace. But then we start to open the rest of the mail. Each card says, "Be Mine" - and the words inside say things like "Wouldn't this be fun?" and "Nobody will ever know." and "Just enjoy yourself." – "Be Mine!" Whose card will we accept? Where will we give our love?

And so we enter into the Lenten season. The scriptures call us to "Return to the Lord our God" The cards say "Be Mine!" But so many other cards arrive with it. And each card invites us - "Be Mine", as though we are so loved and cherished by each of the sender. Adam and Eve believed the serpent. Jesus believed the Heavenly Father. In many ways the choices are simply laid out before us and we must decide - and we do decide every day. The cards, with all that they offer keep coming to our door every day.

The unique thing that is a part of the invitation that comes from our God is that it comes with a commitment that has already been made. I will be your God. The Father said to Jesus at the banks of the Jordan river - "This is my beloved son" He will say that to Kiera today in her baptism. He has said it to you - No matter what - I will be your God! I have already chosen to love you and be your God forever Will you be mine? **AMEN**