

**Legacy**  
**The First Sunday of Lent**  
**Sunday, March 10, 2019**  
**The Rev. Paul McLain**

'If you are the Son of God, . . .' In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

In 1951, a dad packed up his wife, five young children, and his mother to go on a rare family vacation to Washington, D.C. The Dad was tight with a dollar, so when they stopped at a motel for the night, they would all share one room, with the boys bedding down on the floor in sleeping bags. The Dad recalled, "Everywhere we stopped, they charged an extra two dollars for every child who stayed in the room. A room was only about six to eight dollars in those days. I had five children, so my six dollar room became sixteen dollars, or my eight dollar room became eighteen dollars. I told my wife, "This isn't fair."

If he had been like most Dads, he would have blown his stack with the innkeeper, grudgingly paid the extra fee, then would forget about it, and try his best to enjoy the rest of the vacation. But this Dad was not like most Dads. He saw in this nuisance an opportunity, a vision, really, of creating a chain of motels that would not charge for children who stayed in the same room as their parents. He built his first one in front of his lumber yard on Summer Avenue here in Memphis. His name was Kemmons Wilson and the chain of motels he built was Holiday Inn. He turned a short-term nuisance into a long-term dream.

Short-term, versus long-term thinking is at the heart of today's Gospel passage. After being baptized by John, Jesus went into the wilderness, the desert really, where after forty days of fasting, Jesus was tempted by the Devil. And one could make an argument that the expedient move for Jesus would have been to accept the Devil's three offers.

Let's look at the three temptations of Jesus. After forty days without food, he had to be tired and hungry. Turning stone into bread probably sounded good to him. After all, we know he later turned water into wine. And we know he loved nothing better than a good meal. Much of the Gospels are accounts of his many mealtime experiences. In fact, the major criticism he faced in his day was that he was always eating out with sinners and tax collectors.

But Jesus knew the importance of timing. There was a time for eating and a time for fasting. His forty days in the wilderness were a time for prayer, for preparation, for self-emptying. The Devil was tempting Jesus to begin his ministry with a short-term decision centered around himself. Times for eating and celebrating would come. But they would be centered around feeding and serving others. And as he did, Jesus lived into a part of his identity. He later said, "I am the bread of life." And as his disciples today, the center of our worship here each Sunday is a communal meal around this table.

The second temptation is an offer to rule all the kingdoms of the world. Later, when Jesus wasn't eating, he constantly talked about his major project-to bring about the kingdom of God. But Jesus

was talking about a different kind of kingdom than the ones offered by Satan. The kingdom Jesus was and is bringing about is not an external one, but an internal one. It is a kingdom of the heart. And it doesn't come about in some momentary transfer of power. It grows over time through season after season of waiting, teaching, listening, learning, and loving. It is transmitted not through pronouncements, but through the vulnerability of one soul to another. If Jesus had accepted the Devil's shortcut to ruling an earthly kingdom, he would have bypassed the most important part of his ministry: building relationships with his disciples. He later called them his friends. Jesus could have shortchanged them, us, and himself, to miss out on these deep and eternal friendships.

The final temptation was to glorify himself and his father by leaping off the pinnacle of the temple. Notice how the Devil begins a couple of the temptations, "If you are the Son of God" and then asks him to prove it by doing something big. Even at this early stage of his ministry, Jesus knew that his identity as the Son of God was not a title to be proven or grasped. Instead, it was and is a mystery to be lived into over time. He knew that the best way to glorify his father was by walking step-by-step with him, with us, and all his creatures in obedience, devotion, imagination, and love. The Devil's path offered an instant, painless pathway to glory. But his mission was not to avoid pain or struggle, and is instead to enter our humanity fully, even to enter our own wounds and, ultimately, to heal them.

For Jesus and for us, the expedient move is not always the right move. Temptation is usually a whisper to take a shortcut- a shortcut to pleasure, a shortcut to wealth, a shortcut to prestige. And it is an invitation to think short-term, without considering the consequences of our actions, or the infinite possibilities of thinking and acting with a mindset toward the eternal.

One of the vignettes in Bill Craddock's book *Restreaming* is entitled "Legacy." In it, Bill describes being on the mezzanine level of a Holiday Inn where all of Kemmons Wilson's memorabilia and awards were displayed. Bill writes: "The walls were thick with pictures of Mr. Wilson with presidents, celebrities, kings, queens, and various awards from around the world. In the middle of the room there was a man in a wheelchair with a caretaker. I recognized it as Mr. Wilson and introduced myself. We had a pleasant and brief conversation about his distinguished achievements and awards. I casually mentioned that he must feel proud and pleased of all he accomplished over the span of his life. He furrowed his brow and muttered that all of this stuff is not really important to him anymore. He then looked up at me with a peaceful smile and said: 'What has been most important to me is that I have been blessed with the love of my family, my dear friends, and my faith in God.'"

In another vignette, Bill writes of the advice he received from his grandfather, "Your future career is really a vehicle for relationships." For Kemmons Wilson, Holiday Inn was not his legacy. The relationships he nurtured and built along the way were and are his legacy. His long-term vision from a short-term nuisance became his vehicle for lasting relationships.

Jesus rejected short-term bread, kingdom, and glory to infuse us with a love that grows over time - to infuse us with a love that lasts forever. *Amen.*