

March 1, 2020
Breathe and Grow
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7
Psalm 32
Romans 5:12-19
Matthew 4:1-11
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Fellow Ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,
Gracia y paz de dios del Padre, Hijo, y Espíritu Santo
Grace and peace from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Let's start at the very beginning. A very good place to start. When we read we begin with A-B-C.
When we enter Lent, we start with temptation.

We take a step back today, well actually a giant leap back to the VERY beginning.

Set aside your images of six orderly days of creation and God resting comfortably on the seventh day.
Pay attention today to the second creation account – Genesis 2.

"In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up – the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground – then the Lord God formed adam from the dust of the ground, and God breathed into adam's nostrils the breath of life; and adam became a living being."

God's very breath brings to life the one created in God's image.

Formed by God's own hand, brought to life by God's own breath.

Feel yourself breathe . . . in and out, in and out. Take as deep a breath as you possible can. Hold it as long as you are comfortable. Feel the presence of the breath of life, the very breath of God, the Holy Spirit. Exhale slowly. You are breathing the Spirit of the Living God.

The same Spirit who led Jesus up from the baptismal waters of the Jordan River.

The same Spirit who stayed with Jesus 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness.

The same Spirit who guided Jesus through the tests proctored by the tempter.

The same tempter who slithered up to God's beloved creation in the garden.

The same tempter who slithered up to Herod, who will slither up to Judas and Pilate and Caiaphas.

The same tempter who slithers into our lives individually and communally.

Like Jesus, the water of baptism is still dripping from our heads when the tempter begins to stalk us. C.S. Lewis says that when it comes to the tempter, Christians make two mistakes. First, we tend to fixate on what he calls "purposeful evil". We see the Devil under every rock, behind every ache and pain. We see the devil in every human weakness. If only I could be more diligent, I could escape that roaring lion. The other mistake Christians make, according to Lewis is to underestimate the broad power of evil. There is a tendency to dismiss evil as a primitive, unenlightened superstition. We think we're pretty savvy and can spot the big temptations, only to be blindsided by the little, harmless mistakes that eventually become magnified to existential proportions.

Let's go back to the garden for a second. God placed the created one in the garden to care for it. We, too are created to care for *all* of God's creation. I wonder if we have listened too deeply to the tempter's voice, "take just a little of this and a little of that, there's plenty". We're finding out we were wrong about the long-term effects of our taking.

Consider the life that depends on the dirt of God's creation, the trees, the rivers, the oceans, the air. Close your eyes and feel yourself breathe. Now, imagine yourself a crocus bulb lying in the warm dark earth. All is quiet and still. You feel a little twinge, a little vibration. You feel it again. You feel your outer shell crack just a little. At your very core you cannot quiet the movement. You have no idea what is happening and you are powerless to stop it. It doesn't hurt, it just feels weird. Then your whole being remembers this sensation as you feel that slender blade slip through the warming dirt. Suddenly, that blade, that tendril pushes from the surface and you remember, this is what it feels like to be alive in God's creation. This is what you were created to be a bright reminder that God has this whole creation ordered, right down to the one crocus bulb.

Jesus knew what his mission on earth was. He knew that he would be tested. He was there in the garden when the first created humans succumbed to the test. He knew that the tempter would try to cut out the beauty of life. But he didn't go out into that wilderness on his own. "Led up by the Spirit into the wilderness" Jesus went to be tempted by the devil.

He knew that the tempter would be in another garden tempting Jesus to walk away from God's plan for reconciling all of creation. Led by the Spirit all the way to the cross, Jesus breathes new life into God's creation by conquering the power of evil in that borrowed tomb and emerging victorious over all that would separate creation from the creator.

As we walk in the wilderness this Lent, we will be tempted by the evil one. Just remember two things: remember to breathe. And . . . the Holy Spirit is with us.

Thanks be to God.