

**Sermon for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent**  
**Pastor Mike Schuessler**  
**Text: Deuteronomy 26:9-10**

“He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me”

Today we're going to talk about being thankful. When you go to a restaurant you buy the food. At the end of your meal if you appreciated the service you could just say thanks. Or you could express your gratitude by offering your server a gift – perhaps a monetary gift equal to 15% of the cost of the food.

In our Old Testament reading God suggests that his people show their appreciation through a gift. God saved his people from Egypt and brought them to a land flowing with milk and honey. Upon entering the promised land the people were to bring a basket full of the firstfruits of the land to offer before the LORD.

At first glance it seems silly to offer God a gift. What does the creator of all things need with a basket of fruit, or with some of my hard earned cash? Actually, the Bible tells us that God chooses to use his people to answer the prayers of others. Our offerings, given to God, are used to meet the needs of others. Sadly, the average Lutheran in the average congregation gives less than \$5.00 a week to God. We spend more than that for one meal at McDonald's! When the Spirit moves us to say thanks to God by giving him gifts, the devil tempts us to be selfish. “If you give some of your money to God then there will be less money for you to spend on yourself!”

The devil also tempted Jesus to be selfish. That's what's going on in our Gospel reading for today. After forty days in the wilderness with no food, Jesus is hungry. The devil suggests that Jesus turn a stone into bread. Why shouldn't Jesus do something for himself? And how about his mission? Jesus has come for his people. He's supposed to give his life to win them back. But the devil suggests there's an easier way. The devil

showed him the kingdoms of the world and said, “It has been given to me and I can give it to anyone I want to.” All Jesus has to do is bow down to the devil and the crown of thorns will never have to touch his brow. Each time, Jesus responds with the Word of God. He refuses to give in to the temptation to be selfish.

When we are tempted to cut corners, to avoid sacrifice, to selfishly care for ourselves instead of others, we give in all too easily. It is then that the father of lies, the devil, tries to trick us into believing that God no longer loves or forgives us. But these forty days of Lent remind us of the forty days in the desert when Jesus was tempted in our place and did not sin. We recall his temptation on the cross, as the crowds tried to persuade him to call upon those angels who were supposed to protect the messiah. Jesus should come off the cross to prove that he was the chosen one of God. But our Savior stays nailed to the tree, rejected instead of us, selflessly laying down his life for the sheep who have gone astray. He forgives those who were persecuting him and then he died.

On the third day Jesus rose again from the dead. For forty days he met with his disciples and prepared them for the ministry they would do for the rest of their lives. Jesus paid for our sins and continues to provide us with all that we need and more in this world as we wait for the world to come. For that we are thankful. But how can we say thanks to Jesus?

Words and gifts are good. But it has been said that imitation is the highest compliment. I'm not suggesting that we walk on water or give sight to the blind. Rather, we follow the example of Jesus by struggling against temptation. During Lent, take time to fill your mind and heart with a few verses from the Bible that will keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.