

**Lent One**  
**“We are Hungry”**  
**Matthew 4:1-11**  
**Rev. Joy Laughridge**  
**February 22, 2026**

If we have your email address, you should have received an email last week with a link to a pdf of a Lenten devotional called Cobblestones that was written by our organist and music director, Joshua Mazur. Providing this devotional to you is one way that we want to support you on your spiritual journey through Lent so if you didn't get the email you can share your email address and write “lent devotional” on the friendship pad this morning, or you can call or email the church office to request the link or a printed copy. We also do have some printed copies available this morning if you'd like to take one.

The sermon series that we are beginning today that will take us through Lent is connected to and inspired by the devotional, and each week we'll be pulling out one of the Scripture readings and reflections for our focus on Sunday morning. The title of the sermon series, *Loved Always*, is different from the title of the devotional, but it is meant to remind us of something that Joshua has written in the prelude to the devotional. He says, *“Lent is not a program. It is not a challenge, a productivity plan, or a spiritual improvement project. It is a season that invites us to slow down enough to notice the road we are already walking. It is not a journey toward perfection. It is a journey toward honesty. Toward a clearer awareness of ourselves, of*

*God, and of the space between us. There is no requirement to feel a certain way. There is no outcome to achieve. The only invitation is to remain present to what is being revealed. To notice without rushing. To listen without needing to resolve. The road does not ask you to become someone else. It asks you to be where you are.”*

When I read that it made me realize that I often do tend to approach Lent as a season for spiritual self-improvement and that always ends up being burdensome. It becomes burdensome in this way. Say you've given up chocolate or something like cussing, and you wake up in the morning focused on this thing that you're going to try really hard not to do. And the more you focus on trying not to do it, the more you find yourself focused on the thing and on your own difficulty with resisting it. At that point, the thing that you're trying to resist and your own performance take all your focus and there's no attention left to give to God or to what *God* would like to accomplish within you. It can become a very self-defeating exercise and no real change or growth takes place.

With his devotional, I hear Joshua inviting us to take an entirely different approach to our Lenten journey by suggesting that transformation – which *is* the goal of our life in Christ - can happen not by our *doing* but by *being*. This is the invitation then as we proceed with the daily reflections and as we listen to the word proclaimed each week. So, as we begin, let yourself exhale. Let go of any anxiety or pressure you may feel about trying not to be bad or trying to do better for the next 6 weeks. You have permission to be who you are, where you are, and how you are. All we are being asked

to do is pay attention and wait for Jesus to find us right where we are; to know that no matter where and how he finds us, we are loved always; and to be open to letting his grace to do its work in us. With that introduction, let's get into our text for today.

The Scripture and the reflection that I've chosen for the first Sunday in Lent is the traditional Gospel lesson assigned by the lectionary for the first Sunday of Lent, and in it we find Jesus in the wilderness where he is tempted by the devil. As a reminder for context, Jesus's sojourn into the wilderness comes immediately after God confirms his calling and his identity at his baptism. That experience was surely one of those spiritual high points that Brian talked about last week with the Transfiguration. Jesus heard the voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son. I'm pleased with him." You can imagine Jesus coming away from that experience feeling confident and resolved to do everything that God was calling him to do. The time of prayer and fasting in the wilderness would be an opportunity to pray and prepare himself for the work ahead. He would come out of the wilderness prepared to carry out his calling, but it turned out to be a preparation that was forged through the fire of deprivation and discomfort.

The Scripture tells us that after 40 days of prayer and fasting, Jesus was hungry. Hunger is a form of discomfort that we commonly experience, though I doubt the hunger that any of us have experienced is quite like the hunger you would feel after 40 days of no food. Even so, when we feel hungry, we are usually quick to try to find something to eat as soon as possible to make the feelings of hunger

go away. It's a problem to be solved and quickly. In Jesus's case, there wasn't a pantry filled with chips and cookies or a Publix within walking distance, but the devil pointed out that Jesus had something even better than those options available to him. The devil said, "if you're *really* the *Son of God*, just use your *power* to turn the stones to bread." On the surface, the temptation was a temptation to fill his empty stomach by making some bread that would ease the gnawing hunger pangs, but this temptation and the other two that followed, were about more than giving Jesus an easy way out of his present circumstances. The temptations that the devil paraded in front of Jesus were ultimately intended to distract and distance him from the identity and calling that he was sure about when he first entered the wilderness.

Joshua's reflection from day three of the devotional speaks to this. He says, "The temptation is not simply about bread. It is about identity. The suggestion is subtle. If you are you who you say you are, you should not have to feel this way. You should not have to be empty, limited, or dependent. You should be able to fix this." I wonder if we can recognize this temptation when we understand it this way. Maybe we have heard the voice that asks, "If I am God's beloved child, why don't I have everything that I want and think I need? Why do I feel this lack or this emptiness? Why am I not wholly satisfied?" These questions can tempt us as they tempted Jesus, and the quickest way to make the pain or discomfort of it all go away is to try to fill the emptiness or satisfy the longing with whatever power is at our disposal. If I feel lonely, I'll find ways to avoid being alone. If I'm restless, I'll pursue constant activity. If I feel insecure, I'll try to

compensate for those feelings somehow. Just like we run to the fridge at the first inkling of hunger, we are compelled to do whatever we can and as fast as we can to avoid the discomfort that we surely shouldn't have to feel, but in our Scripture Jesus shows us that there is a different way to respond when we are empty and feel deprived of what we need.

First, he does acknowledge the need. He doesn't pretend that he isn't hungry or try to deny that he really does need food. There are things that we need - food, meaningful relationships, a sense of purpose – and when we are missing what we need, we do feel that. Jesus did not deny that he was hungry, but he also did not use his own power to escape his limits. Instead, he accepted the limitations of his humanity, and *he trusted God* despite the discomfort. He trusted what God had already said about him, and he trusted God to provide for his need that was even deeper than his physical need for food.

I realize how remarkable that is when I pause and think of all the ways that I try and do use my own power to escape my limits. I don't want to be hungry, or hurting, or unable to control things, and I will try my best to overcome those things with every bit of power that is available to me, but when I consider Jesus's unwillingness to give in to that temptation, it helps me see these discomforts and my own limits from a different perspective, and this is really the point. The point isn't that we should let go of all agency over our lives, but that we might see in those times of emptiness or dissatisfaction an opportunity to trust not fix.

What if we didn't always try immediately to relieve every discomfort or attempt to satisfy every need through our own efforts? What if we did allow ourselves to feel the hunger, and the emptiness, and the dissatisfaction? And what if we sat with those things long enough to discover what those longings have to teach us about ourselves and long enough to be able to see what and how the God who loves us will take care of our true and deepest needs? Fasting is not a spiritual discipline that I have regularly or frequently practiced, but it is a discipline that is often associated with Lent, and you can begin to see the value in fasting when you think about allowing yourself to feel your hunger and your longings as a means for discovering where you need God's grace the most.

If we take some time during these days of Lent to sit and pay attention, I expect that we are all likely to discover that we are hungry or dissatisfied in some way. Maybe it is in our work or in the activities of our lives. Maybe it is in our relationships. Maybe it is something physical, and the challenge that comes to us today is a challenge to do nothing. That is the do – to do nothing – and to ask only for the grace to sit with the uncomfortable feeling. Don't rush to fix or demand that God should intervene immediately in the way you expect. In so doing, the wilderness can become for us a place of testing but also triumph as it was for Jesus.

We might think that it's impossible to overcome temptation in the way that Jesus did because we aren't Jesus. We are missing that fully divine component to ourselves that he had, but the temptation that Jesus experienced was aimed at his humanity, and he overcame

it in a way that is accessible to every human. He placed his trust completely in God and in God's word – the word spoken at his baptism that confirmed that he is God's beloved Son and the word that confirmed that we don't live by bread alone.

We are people who get hungry – not just for food but for all kinds of things – success, influence, approval, pleasure – all kinds of things. It's important to be able to say honestly that we are hungry, and then to hear the good news that when we are hungry, we are loved by God always. When we are faced with our limits and when we experience pain or deprivation it doesn't mean that we are not loved by God. The devil would certainly have us believe that, but it isn't true. We are God's beloved children when we are satisfied and when we are longing.

Today we are invited to let our hunger push us toward greater reliance on God, not ourselves, and if we will, we can emerge from the wilderness in the same way that Jesus did. Joshua's devotional puts it this way. "Jesus doesn't leave the wilderness with a solution. He leaves it with a relationship." Of all the things that God wants to give to us, of all the things we need, it's that relationship with God that God wants for us and that we need the most. As we endure our discomforts and deficits this season and always, may we be led beyond them into deeper trust of in the God whose love for us never changes. Amen.

