

Focus
Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Luke 4:1-13

Rev. Kenneth M. Locke
Interim Pastor/Head of Staff
First Presbyterian Church, Fond du Lac, WI
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In our Old Testament Lesson this morning, Moses is giving instructions to the Israelites. They've been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, but those days are about over. Soon, they'll be entering the Promised Land. Moses tells them after you've been there a while, when you've settled down and grown some crops, this is what you do.

Make an offering to God and remember everything God has done for you. You didn't free yourselves from the Egyptians. You didn't drive out your enemies all on your own. It was God who did these things for you. Make an offering and worship. Keep your focus on God. Keep your focus on God.

It's a great message. Focus on God. You didn't do it all by yourselves. God has been with you every step of the way.

But if we're not careful it's got a fairy tale feel. It's got a "Happily Ever After" feel to it. You're in the Promised Land. God is with you. Life is good. Eat up. Have a feast. Don't worry, be happy.

It's what many new Christians expect. 'I'm a Christian now, God is with me, everything should be fine.' It's what many long-time Christians think, too. 'I'm a Christian. God is with me. I should be living Happily Ever After.'

But that's not reality, is it? The reality is we live in a fallen world. Sin is real. Life is constantly testing us. Even Jesus was tested.

Jesus has been fasting in the wilderness for 40 days. Was it really 40 days without food? I don't know. Sometimes the Bible uses 40 Days to mean a Really Long Time. The point is, however long he's been there, Jesus is at his lowest. He's famished. He's beyond hungry. He's beyond hangry. A Snicker's Bar isn't going to satisfy. Jesus is at his absolute lowest point.

Which is the way it goes, isn't it? We're never tested when we're fighting fit and at our best. Of course not. We're tested when we're at our lowest point; when we just can't go on.

The temptations Jesus faces are universal temptations about our focus in life. What's our focus? What's our focus in life? Are we focused on God or something else?

Are we focused on our body, our creature comforts? Are we most concerned about our food and drink, our clothes and shoes, how good we look? Is it how many electronic devices we have and when can we get the next one? Is our main concern our next vacation, the value of our home, our retirement fund?

Jesus says, No. Those won't satisfy. Only God satisfies. Only doing God's will satisfies. What's our focus?

Is our focus power and prestige? Are we focused on growing our business, moving up the ladder, grabbing the brass ring? Are we intent on power over others – over our employees and co-workers, our children and spouse, someone else's spouse? Do we want to be admired for our humble volunteerism more than anything else in the world?

Jesus says, No. Those won't satisfy. Only God satisfies. Only doing God's will satisfies. What's our focus?

Is our focus on testing God? Is our focus on manipulating God? Are we that insecure? Are we that power hungry?

God – if I give this much money to the church, will you do this for me? God – if I serve on that team, will you do that for me? God – if I throw myself into this grand project without thinking it through or doing my homework or being prepared, will you rescue me before crash and burn?

Jesus says, No. The only way to live with God is in a loving, trusting relationship. Like any other loving relationship our relationship with God has to be built on trust. Focus On God.

Our faith is not a fairy tale. Life is not Happily Ever After. Sin is real. We live in a fallen world. Sometimes life is so hard we go beyond hungry, we go beyond hangry and that's when temptations pile on. That's when the temptation to forget God, go our own way and make a hash of our life is strongest.

The answer is clear. Focus on God. Keep our focus on God. At all times, keep our focus on God. Moses says when life is good,

keep our focus on God. Jesus says when life is hard, keep our focus on God. Keep our focus on God.

Did Jesus struggle with his answers? Did he answer right away or did he have to stop and think about it and struggle a bit? We don't know. The text doesn't say.

Personally, I think Jesus struggled. I think Jesus had to stop and pull back and think about his answers.

We know Jesus is fully divine. We also know Jesus was fully human. And surely, surely the human part of him must have struggled with these questions.

I like to think so. I don't feel so bad about struggling, myself. Jesus having to struggle gives me permission to struggle. Jesus having to struggle gives us permission to struggle.

The human Jesus did the right thing. He kept his focus. Even though he was beyond hungry he kept his focus. By God's grace, when the temptations pile on to turn away and follow our own, disastrous path, by God's grace may we, like Jesus, keep our focus on God. Amen.