**Lent 1, Year A; Genesis 2: 15-17, 3: 1-7; Matthew 4: 1-11; Rev Mary Trainor**

The buzzer is going off and the light is flashing, and we have to pay attention -- our lives depend upon responding appropriately to this alert. It's the "**stall warning indicator**" going off. Oh dear! Not good. Most of us have never flown an airplane, but if we had, we would have known about the "stall warning indicator" that lights up and buzzes with alerts if you go below a 60 mph. If the plane you are flying goes below 55 mph you are headed down fast. Today, on the first Sunday in Lent, we enter into the season of the "stall warning indicator" of our lives. Oh, we can fly along being busy in life, and not intentionally (and maybe without even noticing) we can stall spiritually. We don't want the buzzer to go off and the light to flash on us; we want not only not to get into trouble, we want to stay on course: on the course of following Jesus. Lent can be seen as going into the shop for preventative maintenance. Lent is about becoming more aware of how we are living, noticing where we are tempted, turning away from sin and turning towards Christ.

The word "sin" appeared a whole lot in our Scripture readings this morning -- specifically ten times, and was alluded to a whole lot more than that. It is the theme for the day, and we don't much like to think about sin. [*Unless, of course, it has to do with how our society treats sin -- look on the internet and you can learn about all kinds of attractive things called "sin" -- the perfume called "my sin," the baking company that makes delicious chocolate desserts called "sin," and of course travel adds to come to "sin city:" Las Vegas*.] We have heard the word "sin" our whole lives, but did you ever realize that this word is (by its very nature) gets it's meaning from religion? To call something a sin presumes a belief in God. Look at page 848 in the BCP: "**Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God."** Sin is about the choices we make in light the fact that we have a knowledge of God's moral code-- and you heard it this morning when I recited Jesus' summary of the law. It was near the beginning of our service on page 324: **that we shalt love the Lord they God with all thy heart, soul, mind...and love thy neighbor as thyself.** **"On these two commandments hang all the Law."**All other commandments fit under the umbrella of these two great commandments. We know the fundamentals of what is right and wrong in the eyes of God.

Our readings today illuminate us about temptation, sin, and obedience to God. We began with Genesis, with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve both ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil -- the ONLY tree that God told them not to eat from! God blessed them with the Garden, and gave them just one limit, one boundary: NOT to eat the fruit of that particular tree. They could eat all they wanted from all the other trees! But oh my, the fruit of that tree was very attractive -- and it symbolized power: Adam and Eve wanted the same knowledge that God had. This forbidden fruit was just too tempting -- and they both ate. After the fact, "***their eyes were opened***"-- they knew they had made a big mistake, they had sinned and there were consequences.

Then we moved on to praying Psalm 32: "***happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sin is put away.***" People seek happiness; we live in a culture of people who have everything, yet are unhappy and do not understand why. This verse's message shares the key: put away sin, allow God to forgive you, and happiness comes. This is well illustrated by the life of Rose Macaulay, an early 20th Century well known English novelist. She who had a long affair with a married man (*story from Diogenes Allen's book, Theology for a Troubled Believer*). She had thought she was happy, until he died; then she slowly recovered her lost faith, and discovered true happiness through repentance. She wrote: "**Now I regret the affair very much. It's as if absolution and communion and prayer let me through into a place where I got a clear, new view-- so I see all the waste, the cost of it, how it poisoned the springs of my own life and other people's....I now see why belief in God fades away and has to go while one is leading a life one knows to be wrong. The two can't live together....After what has occurred to me lately, I know there is a personal relationship with God**." Indeed, she discovered: "***happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sin is put away.***"

Our Epistle echoes this message, where St. Paul talked a lot about sin beginning with Adam and redemption through Christ. Here is Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of this passage: ***"Just as one person did it wrong and got us in all this trouble with sin and death, another person did it right and got us out of it. But more than just getting us out of trouble, he got us into life!"***  Christ came to bring us life! And Christ Jesus understands the challenges we have. In our Gospel reading we heard about when Jesus spent 40 days and nights in the wilderness tempted by the devil. He faced three temptations, each tailored just for Him: to use his powers to his own advantage, to doubt God, and to do the right thing by the wrong means. As it says in Hebrews 4:15: Jesus, "***understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin."*** We all indeed face testing; and our temptations seem to be tailored just for us -- around our weaknesses. Unlike Jesus we do sin, but like Jesus we have God to turn to for strength, to help us turn away from sin. The Ash Wednesday service captured this message so well.

Ash Wednesday was all over the news this week. Photos of people with ash crosses on their foreheads were everywhere: Twitters, Youtube, selfies as Instagrams. Thursday's Wall Street Journal, had an article on "Ashtags." The 20-something people interviewed said they satisfied their anxious parents who wanted them to go to church on Wednesday by posting selfie photos of them with the ash cross on their foreheads and the message: "Mom, look, I went, I promise...see?" This is a fun thing, but misses the point of the day: it is about personal honesty, facing our own sins: the light blink and buzzer go off in the warning indicator.

We need a savior, and Christ comes. He pulls us up out of a downward stall and gives us the tools to put us on the right path. These tools are listed on p. 265: “**by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word.”**

I invite you to observe a Holy Lent. Amen.