

## More Ordinary Temptations—Matthew 4:1-11

So many temptations are so ordinary that we hardly recognize them as temptations.

We don't even see them in the first place.

Today, I want to share a few with you. They may resonate with you, but if not, you can just walk along with me and reflect on your own ordinary temptations, whatever they may be, and how you might cope with them. Even transcend them.

Yours temptations don't have to concur with my short list.

What we have in common is that they are **ordinary**.

- I'm in a meeting of an inter racial group. Some of us have known each other for many years. We have been through a lot together.

Somehow, without any conscious intent, our group, in the past five years, has come to be chaired by only white men.

In one on one conversations and invitations to leadership, some of us have tried to change that.

But with no success....yet!

This is not a good thing. An inter racial group led by white men?

Especially since it wasn't always that way.

Over the years, we just sort of drifted into it.

And yet! We also seemed unable to talk about it as a group.

What do you say? How do you say it?

No one could. White or black!

**The temptation to silence!**

Silence can be comfortable.

But silence is also complicit!

Silence can be complicity with an **uncomfortable** status quo.

Finally, someone, a white man, said it in our meeting right here last month:  
*“We have to do better than being led only by white men.”*

*“Wow, that was blunt.”* An African American woman replied.

We discussed it for a little while, agreed to think and pray about it.

The next time we met—here again—last Tuesday—the minutes of the previous meeting were distributed.

The discussion of leadership wasn’t in the minutes. Not by intentional mischief. An African American woman is the clerk. Just being silent when not knowing how to report it.

“Hey, before approving these minutes, what about the discussion of leadership? Weren’t we going to try to do something? So that next year, we are led by someone other than a white man?”

Slowly but surely, the discussion got going. We actually got somewhere—in our inter racial group.

Despite **the temptation to be silent.**

It is one of the most ordinary temptations. Isn’t it? To be silent?

- In the world of the arts, some of us have been involved in a puzzling wrestling match with a city department for—let’s see—at least three months now:

Contracts! Money! Invoices! Programming! Doubts!

**What’s agreed upon in writing vs. what’s agreed upon in conversations.**

The fate of the Kids Team Up for Art program going back and forth between the emergency room and “In recovery”...Maybe!

Lots of phone calls, emails, texts, meetings.

Hurry up and wait!

Hurry up and....please be quiet this time.....get in line!

Hurry up and....no, it’s too late! You didn’t hurry up enough!

**Two ordinary temptations have arisen in all of this:**

One—the temptation to just blow up.

“It’s all your fault!”

“You are always so.....”—you fill in the blank.

“As I said three minutes ago.....”let me remind you again....”

Finish it in whatever way fits the situation you are dealing with.

Or....Heck, make a big, bad threat!

**Or!!!.....or.....why not, for a change, try the Jesus way today!**

Ask—A—Question. Wow! That’s novel!

Suppose, as the tension builds and builds—instead of tightening your grip, instead—you ask a question.....the Jesus way....

*Have you ever considered the birds of the air?*

*Have you looked at these flowers lately?*

*How many loaves do you have?*

*What are you looking for?*

*What do you want me to do for you?*

A scholar says Jesus asked 307 questions in the New Testament.

Patient researcher!

*So....Ask a question!*

You can build a wall or you can build a bridge, it all depends on the love you give.....**and—the question you ask.**

**If you ask a question, you have to stop talking and listen.**

**And if you have to make a threat, at least stop and think through all your words—each one—so you can present it as—nothing personal—just a response you might have no other choice but to make.....**

**.....We signed the Kids Team Up for Arts Contract last Thursday.**

**We praise God!**

- You see, in almost every matter each of us is dealing with, we have this **more than ordinary temptation** to focus on tasks—

—and what **we want to get done!**—

--instead of focusing on relationships...and **what might grow.**

It's a common temptation in our *Just Do It!*—*Get it Done!*—*Make the Goal!* world.

How do you overcome this temptation?

The 12 step book *24 Hour a Day* offers a prescription, which, on the bottle reads:

***Before you can Do—you must Be!***

*To **accomplish** much, you must first Be Much!*

*In all cases, the doing must be the expression of the being.*

*It is a foolish temptation to think we can accomplish much of anything in personal relationships without first preparing ourselves by being loving, unselfish, honest and friendly.*

*Quiet times spent in communion with God are the preparation we need for creative action.*

- I want to speak to one more ordinary temptation.

The temptation to become discouraged.

The temptation to let your discouragement **own you.**

Discouragement is not only ordinary, it is widespread today.

We feel powerless over so many facets of our lives.

There seems to be no end to discouraging events.

They pile up in— Instant news! Instant social media! Instant Instagram! Instant pop ups make the pile multiply hour by hour, minute by minute, second by second!

Like the coronavirus, discouragement itself is highly contagious.

You see something terrible.

You hear something terrible.

It's overwhelming, isn't it?

Your mood becomes fragile, and you are susceptible to rapidly spreading, contagious discouragement.

But wait!.....Suppose you flip the script!

Isn't ENCOURAGEMENT also contagious?

Haven't you been in a low mood, and along came a phone call, a text, a message, a visit by someone with an encouraging spirit, and—presto!—the communication itself has lifted you! (pause)

An incident in the New Testament that illustrates this idea:

In his second letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul described himself as being “discouraged.... Downhearted.....afflicted at every turn....fighting fear without and fear within”.

***“But then, he added “the God who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.”***

In the Old Testament, in a national drama, when the Jewish people were dismayed and discouraged by a report from 12 spies that their enemies were far too strong for them and would stop their progress, one of the 12 spies, Caleb, rose up and said, *“No, let us find courage, for we are quite able to go there.”*

**Jesus himself, in today's encounter with the One Who Is Greater than the Sum of all Evil, en-couraged himself, within, and replied:**

***“No, I will not worship you, and No!—I will not respect your foolish plans or give any credence to your constant lies.”***

So there are times in which we must encourage ourselves and we must encourage others, so that we do not fall inwardly to the temptation of discouragement.

As Pogo the Possum once said, and later was quoted on an Earth Day poster:  
*“We have met the enemy, and He is us.”*

And even within us!.....

So let us be wise! Take your inner enemy by surprise!

Courage grows from letting your fears say their prayers!

—in the face of life’s **ordinary temptations!**

Amen.

First Sunday of Lent, March 1, 2020

Rev. Scott Myers, Westport Presbyterian Church

- TEMPTATION TO FOCUS ON TASKS RATHER THAN RELATIONSHIPS
- TEMPTATION TO BE DEFEATED BY YOUR DISCOURAGEMENT