

First Sunday in Lent

March 9, 2014

Haven Evangelical Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD

Readings: Genesis 2: 15-17, 3: 1-7; Romans 5: 12-19; Matthew 4: 1-11

Settle for the Lie or Live in the Truth?

Grace to you and peace from God – Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen

It was one of the most rewarding and frightening conversations she had ever had with her son. In her book Made to Crave, Lysa Terkeurst recounts the story of her teenage son who came to her scared. He admitted “he had compromised his standards and gone too far with his girlfriend. They hadn’t crossed every line, but enough that he knew they were headed in a dangerous direction.” He wanted help deciding what to do.” They looked up the word “compromise.” It read “1. To expose or make vulnerable. 2. To make an unfavorable concession or indulgence. 3. To weaken.”

This was exactly the way he felt — that they had exposed their relationship to emotions they were not ready to handle. They had indulged in an area God wanted to preserve, yet the world told them they deserved. And, it had weakened their relationship.

Mother and son sat on the back deck of their house and processed the situation together. At one point Lysa asked, “What happens when you delete ‘com’ from the word *compromise*?” “You’re left with a ‘promise.’” She shared that he was made for more than compromise. He was made for God promises in every area of his life. We are made to live in God’s promises of an abundant life of truth, strength, and peace. They read together some of the Scripture verses Lysa had been using to guide her in her own physical battle with unhealthy eating. They talked about how they might apply to his situation. In the end he and his girlfriend would come to agree that they needed to break up. It’s really hard to put things in reverse after certain lines have been crossed.

When Lysa walked back into the house after that initial conversation, she said there were two things running through her brain. “I was thrilled my son came to me to talk about

such a sensitive issue. What an honor to breathe truth into his physical struggle. But I also felt a little panicked at the realities of parenting an older teenager. I headed straight to the pantry for comfort food.

“As I loaded my arms full of treats, I turned and saw my son standing on the other side of the kitchen. I was suddenly struck by a gut-wrenching question. How could I expect my son to apply truth to the area of his greatest physical struggle, but refuse to apply it to my area of greatest physical struggle? The question struck deep. If I wanted to model what it looks like to live out God’s truth, [to live in God’s promises,] I would have to [stop compromising] and break up with my unhealthy food choices”¹

Adam and Eve and Jesus faced their own choice between living in God’s life-giving promises or compromising. At the very heart of what we call temptation is the choice between moving with God or going our own way. When we choose to have our needs or desires met outside the will of God — which is one definition of sin — we are choosing to draw away from God to go our own compromising way. At the heart of sin is the relational decision to turn away from God and who we are as God’s children and settling for some other, some worldly substitute.

Now when it’s put that way, we might wonder, “Who would choose to do that? Why would we ever deliberately choose to give God the boot?” Why??? Because temptation is always wrapped in seductive, rationalizing lies. Look at the story in Genesis. Temptation takes the form of a snake who suggests God is not trustworthy. “Did God really say?.... You will not die!... God just doesn’t want you to be God’s equal.” The serpent projects a wedge of doubt between Adam and Eve and God and invites them to create their human identities independent of any relationship with God. They are lured by the lie that they could create their own version of reality apart from God and without any adverse consequences. So they swallow the lies, step outside the will and love of God where they find themselves exposed, vulnerable and ashamed not only before God but each other.

They compromised their life as God's beloved... They compromised their relationship with God and one another for a lie that will ultimately fail to satisfy their deepest needs for love, security and peace that can only be fully found in God.

The tempter of Jesus in the desert starts the same place where the snake did in Eden. Jesus has just come from the waters of the Jordan where God declared, "This is my Son in whom I am pleased." Three times the tempter starts his ploy with "IF you are the Son of God....", questioning God's trustworthiness, casting doubt upon that relationship between Jesus and the Father. The Adversary suggests Jesus pursue his own agenda for his own gratification. As with Adam and Eve, the tempter tries to get Jesus to trade in his God-given identity for an identity of his own manufacturing.

Jesus is able to resist this temptation not by sheer will but "by taking refuge in an identity founded and secured through his relationship with God,"² a relationship in which he acknowledges utter dependence on God's grace, truth and promises. Jesus will remain hungry, be vulnerable and refuse to seek power apart from God because he is putting his allegiance and trust in the Lord revealed in Scripture and with whom he has bound his life.

Each day we are besieged by countless advertisements that play on our insecurities, on our worries about having enough, being enough. We are promised that if only get the right car, use the right hair products, drink the right beverage we'll be better off, more acceptable and admired. The values we're exposed to every day in countless arenas say we're not enough — not skinny enough, smart enough, rich enough, pretty enough, strong enough, young enough, old enough to deserve love, respect or acceptance.³ And it's all a lie. A lie that has us imprisoned in unhealthy obsession and damaging habits trying to get the impossible from things like money, looks, prestige, food, drugs, promiscuity. It's a lie that has us add our own layer of lies to justify our compromises — "It's only once." "Everyone else is doing it." "It's not hurting anyone." "I'm too old to change." "Why bother? It's just the way I am." Jesus shows us that the way to

be freed from such identity theft is by staying grounded in our baptismal identity as God's beloved. Jesus goes on further to live and die on a cross to show us the deepest of all truths — that God loves us, treasures us, considers us priceless beyond measure"⁴ for eternigty. That's the truth that sets us free for so much more than temptation's fantasies.

We come to worship each week to be fortified by God's Word and Meal, to hear and taste of God's promises of faithfulness, of our eternal acceptance as God's beloved sons and daughters. We are made for more than dead end compromises born of the adversaries lies and false promises. During Lent we are invited to take a look at ourselves. Like Lysa, we might find ourselves needing to break off our relationship with some unhealthy habit or direction and return to the freedom of God's promises, truth and love. Turn toward God or away? Live in the promises and freedom of God's will or run after the illusive ways of the world? Temptation is real. But so is the power of Christ made available to us when we follow God's ways and live in our truest identity as children of God. Christ wants to share the power to free us so we can say with our lives,"Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Thanks be to God.

Amen

Linda M Alessandri 3/8/14

ENDNOTES

1. Lysa Terkeurst, Made to Crave: Devotional Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan, 2010 pp 35-37.
2. David Lose, "Identity Theft" posted on www.workingpreacher.org March 3, 2014
3. David Lose, "Identity Theft" posted on www.workingpreacher.org March 3, 2014
4. David Lose, "Identity Theft" posted on www.workingpreacher.org March 3, 2014