

First Baptist Church of Augusta
Old Testament: Isaiah 55:1-9
Epistle: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13
Life's Big Temptations: Assuming God Doesn't Care
March 7, 2010

NRS 1 Corinthians 10:1 *I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. 6 Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. 7 Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." 8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. 10 And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. 13 No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.*

Through this season of Lent I have been exploring Life's Big Temptations. Some are rather mundane, like being tempted by food. In my family, food in general, and the supper table in particular, was where we came together. I like the way Roy Blount writes about eating in his book, Long Time Leaving: "The way folks were meant to eat is the way my family ate when I was growing up in Georgia. We ate till we got *tired*. Then we went "Whoo!" and leaned back and wholeheartedly expressed how much we regretted that we couldn't summon up the strength, right then, to eat some more."

If you ask me to forgo desserts or eat less or skip fried food – all the things I know I should do – I find I am tempted at every turn. Of course, in the big scheme of things all of the above is rather trite. There are of course other temptations that are serious struggles for some: alcohol abuse, lust, violence. Temptations in their various forms come down to giving in or giving up. Some give up ultimately. Every year around 33,000 deaths are attributed to suicide in the United States.

What about theological temptations, such as, God does not care? That is a way of giving up on God. Isaiah shares with us those familiar words, that *God's ways are not our ways; God's thoughts are not our thoughts*. That is a pretty direct way of speaking of God's otherness; transcendence. It is my belief that we should not get so cozy with God that we reduce the Creator of the universe as just another friend or worse, a pet, which we can love when convenient.

I find some comfort in the idea of the otherness of God, the transcendence of God. God is mysterious, unknowable, uncontainable, and beyond thought, speech or imagination. The trouble is, when God is singularly thought of as so far away and unreachable, it can lead one to think, God does not care.

Some of you have come here this morning overshadowed by a cloud of assumption that God, quite frankly, does not care about your questions, your doubt, your troubles, your worries. God is, in other words, aloof and removed from all personal dramas. This is the God of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, and the theological belief system of deism, that influenced many in the first 100 years of our nation's history.

While some are tempted to give up on God, because it is believed that God does not care, others are tempted to give up on God, because God does not care enough. We hear this embedded in the well-worn but