

***“Abundant Living: Our Journey Begins”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
First Sunday in the Season of Lent, March 9, 2014  
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Scriptures: Matthew 4: 1-11

**Matthew 4:1-11**

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.

The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Church Camp is a hoot.

Every summer we collect children, teenagers, and adult counselors

to share a week together for sleep-away-camp

held at Camp Christian in Gordon, Georgia.

Each camp is age-specific,

meaning that each age group has its own week of camp.

Young people who have completed 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades attend Chi Rho Camp.

Over the past 30 years of pastoral ministry

I've been to more middle school camps than any other.

I volunteer to serve as either a counselor or director

because those were my own toughest years growing up

and I can relate to what many of our junior high youth are going through.

Having said that, Chi Rho Camp is a hoot.

You can literally see the hormones bouncing off the walls and around the camp.

One day over lunch a boy shared that he liked a particular girl.

"I think I love her," he said.

He was asked, "Does she know how you feel?"

"I think so," he said. "Every time I see her I put ice down her back."

Our girls can hold their own.

One summer a small group of girls would periodically corner a boy

and hold him down while they painted his finger nails with polish.

After a thorough coating had been successfully applied on a boy,

a girl turned to me and said, “Next summer we’re bringing glitter!”

Church Camp is holy.

Each evening the camp gathers for evening vespers.

Often the day’s closing worship service is planned and led by a 8 or 10 teenagers.

Worship services have been held by the swimming pool,  
down by the lake,

around a blazing campfire, in an open-air chapel in the  
woods,

or under a canopy of stars in a grassy field.

One evening after a full day of playing, singing, swimming,  
and studying God’s word,

we gathered for evening vespers at the Labyrinth.

A Labyrinth is circular pathway that weaves walkers back  
and forth

as they work their way toward the center and then back out  
again.

A Labyrinth enables walkers to pray and move,  
to ponder and pause and steadily walk with God,  
either alone or two or three at a time.

At Camp Christian our Labyrinth is as broad and wide as this  
holy sanctuary,

crafted by children, youth and adults in the woods  
alongside a main pathway in camp.

The path is three feet wide,

with hand-placed stones defining the dirt path from ferns  
and trees.

At the center is a gazebo for resting, pausing, sharing,  
visiting, and praying.

That day our camp had explored in song and study and small  
groups

the story of Jesus of Nazareth’s 40 days and nights in the

desert.

The small group that planned worship gathered us in the dining hall.

They started the evening service with songs and psalms, and then led us on a silent walk down the path to the entrance of the Labyrinth.

Each camper and counselor were handed a small stack of note cards

with Holy Scriptures printed on them.

Then we were sent into the Labyrinth in pairs.

The campers walking through the Labyrinth had not travelled 30 feet

when suddenly the peace was interrupted.

Their camp friends were standing just outside the Labyrinth, saying,

*“Hey, come over here! We are having a party.*

*The party doesn’t start until you arrive! Eat, drink, and be merry!*

*It’s all about you! You are the center of the universe.*

*Everything that matters starts and ends with you.”*

The Labyrinth walkers remembered the story of Jesus’ encounter with the tempter

who came and said to Jesus, *“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”*

So our young people read aloud from their note cards what Jesus answered to the tempter:

*“It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”*

They understood that Jesus response meant that first we must consider what lasts.

Don’t sacrifice eternal joy and life everlasting for a fleeting

pleasure.

Don't succumb to the tyranny of the urgent.

Don't slip into the senseless fear of scarcity when we live in the midst of abundance.

Do have a faith that affirms that the Lord does, indeed, provide.

Campers and counselors continued to meander along the Labyrinth path, staying between the stones and moving forward.

Suddenly another batch of camp friends beckoned to us to heed their calls.

This time the tempters sought to seduce us with words of entitlement.

*“Whatever you want, you should have!*

*Come on over here and get what you are entitled to!*

*It is all for you. You can buy happiness.*

*You being who you are, you are entitled to get what you want.*

*We are making a bundle using others and the world as a resource.*

*Forget those do-gooders and join the goods getters.”*

Our youth recalled well that the devil had taken Jesus to the holy city

and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him,

*“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down;*

*for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’*

*and ‘On their hands they will bear you up,*

*so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”*

So they quoted the Scriptures, shouting at their tempters,

*“Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”*

And one girl added, *“Do not test my faith! I love Jesus and His ways!”*

They grasped that Jesus’ response meant that first we must care.

Care and have compassion for one another.

Receive one another not as resources but as original blessings made in the image of God.

Don’t let your promises falter and fold when tested in hostile environments.

Do have a faith that trusts and obeys.

God is nigh,  
and calls us to be other-centered.

There was only 30 feet left to go before the safety of the gazebo

in the center of the Labyrinth when out of the blue another group of friendly tempters appeared from just outside the path.

You know, the devil most often arrives in the guise of a friend

who knows your name and your pain and claims to know what is best for you.

The tempters meant to impress the campers with the power of independence.

*“Hey, come over here. You don’t need anyone else.*

*It is all up to you. Have it your own way.*

*You don’t need to rely on another soul, on the holy, or on the church.*

*You can be spiritual without being religious.*

*Who needs a faith community when God is already within?”*

But even such seductive words and beckoning friends

did not dissuade church campers steeped in the Word of God.

They knew from that morning's Bible study that the devil had taken Jesus to a very high mountain. There he had shown Christ all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

He said to Jesus, "*All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.*"

So our youth held high their note card and said aloud, "*Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and God only shall you serve.'*"

Jesus responded as he did because we must consult the holy. Seek divine guidance.

Listen, meditate and discern the will of God for your life and actions.

Have an abundant faith that seeks to hear and follow the Word.

At the core of worship is the joy of spiritual engagement.  
At the core of spiritual engagement is the call to serve.  
At the core of community service is the desire to return and give God thanks and praise.

Then the tempters left the campers and counselors alone. Soon we all arrived at the gazebo where angels, also known as the Diakonos, the servants of God, came and waited on us.

We took a few minutes to process what we'd just experienced.

Some recalled that the Tempters claimed "*it is all about*

*you.”*

Yet Jesus and the campers held true to their promise,  
and responded that first we must consider what lasts.

Others remembered that the tempters alleged *“it is all for  
you.”*

Yet Jesus and the campers held fast to their promise,  
and responded that first we must care for each other.

Some said the tempters had bragged, saying, *“It is all up to  
you.”*

Yet Jesus and the campers lifted high their promise,  
and responded that first and foremost we are called to  
consult God.

After a snack of juice and goldfish crackers and a quick  
prayer,  
we left the gazebo en masse to find our way home,  
meandering back and forth, back and forth along the  
Labyrinth path.

Suddenly the campers standing outside the lines returned to  
confront the walkers.

Only this time we saw that the power of the spoken Word of  
God

had converted them from tempters to encouragers, from  
devils to deacons.

With joy and clapping and cheering they cheered on their  
friends.

Some held posters that read:

*“Do not be conformed to the world but be transformed by  
the grace of God!”*



*“The Lord does provide!”*

*“Run with perseverance the race that is set before you!”*

*“You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you!”*

And so it was that we came out the Labyrinth in the wilderness  
to journey together with Jesus and one another along the  
Way.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  
Amen!*