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There once was a little girl named Tara who went to her babysitters one day and there in the living room was a beautiful gingerbread house; all decorated for the Christmas season. Candies all over it; icing and gumdrops, candy canes and M&M's covered almost every square inch. The temptation was too great and even though she had been told not to touch it, when no one else was in the room she started to pick away at the display. When the adults returned to the room and saw what she had done they confronted her and her response was this, "You didn't see me?"

Justification! You didn't see me it must be ok. Have any of you tried this? I know I have...one more bite of cake, one last chocolate, no one will know. For some it may be more dangerous. One more drink, one more hit of ecstasy or heroin, one more affair; looking to satisfy that one great temptation. We all have them, don't you worry about that; we are tempted by all kinds of things.

Friday, we were in Belleville doing some shopping; a man tapped me on the arm and asked, "Did you drop this?" It was a \$10 bill. I stooped to pick it up and realized in that moment – no it isn't mine – but now what do I do; have I claimed it as mine because I picked it up? Is it a set-up by one of those hidden camera things to see how honest people are? The man who brought it to my attention was watching me; perhaps if he didn't see me I would keep it? Is that the right thing to do? We asked another customer close by, no, not hers. Now what! No one wants the money, we can't give it away. We took it to an employee, let them handle the temptation!

I think we have all been in this situation at some time or another. Money on the ground, no one around to claim it, it becomes ours. No one is there to see; it might as well be me taking it as someone else! I could sure use an extra \$10 I've moved five times in six years with this ministry thing and I don't make all that much to begin with.

Justification! Temptation!
Promises made, promises broken.

This is a very human experience. We promise all kinds of things and then temptation hits, justification takes over and promises are broken.

Lent. Today is the first Sunday in Lent, that time in our church calendar of opening ourselves to the honest reflection of the experiences of our lives. A time for us to come clean, so to speak. To face the things within ourselves that lead us to justification and broken promises. The temptations that can take us down a path that does not show our best qualities. A time for us to take inventory of our lives; of who we are and who we want to be; who God is calling us to be.

Lent is our time with God. It is an opportunity to be selfish, it's all about me. Jesus took his time with God. We are told that he went into the wilderness and was tempted to show who he really was. The gospel of Mark doesn't go into the details of the temptations Jesus faced but they are universal really. He was tempted with opportunities to use his power, he was offered all of the things that we are offered still today, money, power, material goods, health, longevity. This temptation is played out really well in the movie, Jesus of Montreal. This movie was very controversial when it came out in the 70's but may seem tame by today's standards.

Jesus of Montreal shows a group of actors in Montreal who are contracted by a Catholic church to act out the Passion of Christ in a live performance. The church had a long history of doing this play but it was getting stale, people weren't attending like they had in the past. So the actors revamp it, to make it a modern interpretation of the old, tired story. The church is not happy with the play itself but the response from the public is tremendous and its popularity is noticed by film producers who want to buy it from them. As the movie progresses you notice that the actors have become completely taken over by the lives of the people they are portraying, particularly the actor playing Jesus. The great temptation scene of this movie is when the Hollywood director has appeared with offers of fame and fortune. They are standing at a window overlooking the city of Montreal and the director gestures out to the city saying to the actor, "this could all be yours".

The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness gives us pause. We are not unlike him, he is not unlike us. We determine what will tempt us and where it will lead us. The wilderness that Jesus went to may have in fact been a beautiful place, a holy place. So often we think of the wilderness as this horrible, dry, barren land but when you think of it the wilderness where Jesus is thought to have retreated too is holy ground; a place for quiet reflection, the place where Moses was called and the Israelites lived for forty years, a holy place of Jesus' ancestors. This, of course, doesn't mean that it is void of danger of course there is danger. Whenever we encounter the holy there is danger but it is indeed a place that changes you forever.

Once we enter the wilderness with just ourselves and God we cannot escape; justification no longer works. There is no one to justify it to because even though we may think no one sees us, when we are alone with God we know that God knows. It is here in this alone time with God that we discover who we really are. It was here that Jesus discovered his true call; what he was really here to do. It is in this wilderness, alone with God that we are stripped bare of all that we use to hide, we present ourselves open, vulnerable, ready to start again.

It is here that the promise made to Noah and to all those who follow throughout the ages continue to have relevance until this very day. The promises that we are reminded of each time we see a rainbow, God's eternal covenant that never again will floodwaters destroy all life. The promise that God is always there with us and will not destroy us. No excuses, no justifications needed. We are not alone; we live in God's world.

Amen

