

Year A – First Sunday in Lent– February 22, 2026

Pastor Megan Floyd

Matthew 4:1-11

Grace and peace to you from God and the Holy Spirit, and from Jesus Christ, who loves us and claims us as his own. Amen.

I grew up watching Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood... Looking back over my life, I'm pretty sure that's what radicalized me.

In Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, you knew you belonged, and that who you were... was good... and that... the other people around you... well, they might be different from you... look different from you... but... they were good, too.

In that neighborhood, there was an overwhelming sense that *we belonged to each other*... there was shared love and respect for other people, even when they made mistakes.

In Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, each person... or character... was valued... seen... and supported. This is something that *everyone* of us needs, not just children... and we need this throughout our whole lives.

Mr. Rogers was not just the face and creator of the children's show... he was also a Presbyterian pastor... so it's not surprising at all... that his neighborhood intentionally reflected... the beloved community that we, who are followers of Jesus, work to build.

Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood was a little taste of what God's vision for us might look like when we take seriously the ways of living that Jesus called us to practice.

It was a little sample of living in the promised kingdom of God... for 30 minutes at a time.

Those of us who were raised in Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood know that a better, more beautiful, and beloved neighborhood is possible... *if we choose* to live that way.

Growing up with a show like this... it's no wonder that I feel so strongly that compassion for others is healthy... that empathy can heal divides... and that love and support should not have conditions.

It's no wonder... that I *don't want* to bend to the unjust power systems in this world... in this country... even though... I could work the system to bend in my favor. I could! ...it is, after all, set up for me to do so... it's *tempting* to take advantage of that.

Case in point... I am a white, cisgender, heterosexual woman, wife, and mother, from a middle-class family... and my husband does not suffer from the delusion that I am merely an accessory to his lifestyle.

I have a world-class education that was mostly achieved without debt, I do not suffer from debilitating diseases like addiction or depression, and... at least at this moment, I am still able-bodied... most of the time.

It is tempting... it's tempting... to sink into the power structures that privilege nearly all of my life's characteristics.

But to do so... would mean to accept an unjust and unequal community... it would mean giving up on the better way that I know is possible... not just because Mr. Rogers showed me that way when I was a child... but because Jesus was super clear about it.

Embracing a privilege that marginalizes others is not part of God's vision for us... for humanity... it does not ask us to become the best version of ourselves... or call us into a more beloved community.

But... when power and privilege are laid out before you for the taking... it's tempting... to reach out and take it, no matter who it harms.

This is, of course... what Jesus himself... faced in the wilderness immediately following his baptism... immediately after hearing the voice of God claiming him as God's beloved, in whom God was well pleased.

The Spirit led him out there... into the desert... where he fasted for 40 days... facing spiritual and physical challenges... he was famished, and weak... and at his most vulnerable moment, the devil stepped in... as the devil is wont to do.

We all have experience with the devil... with the voice of the accuser... whether you believe the devil to be an actual being... or the shadow side of our own human self... it doesn't matter.

In whatever shape it takes on... the accuser... the devil... is the one who whispers lies in our ear... lies about ourselves and others. It's the voice of shame... the voice that isolates and diminishes... *That is* the voice of the accuser.

God's voice is the one who declares us worthy and loved... while the voice of the accuser, on the other hand... is the one who pulls us away from God's purpose... and from God's vision for us.

The voice of the accuser is the one who would have us forget our identity as beloved... as children of God... and who offers only empty promises.

It's what the devil tried to offer Jesus... he tried to entice him to reject his identity and grasp at empty promises... to wield power that would serve only himself... instead of those he came to serve.

Because... Jesus *does* have the power to do what the devil suggests... but he chooses not to use it. He chooses not to become an agent for the accuser, because he knows that he is... an agent of God.

And Jesus knows... that empires are not eternal... and nations are not sovereign over God... and earthly power is not permanent.

What the devil offers are false promises and lies, and what is built on false promises will fall... but what is rooted in God's love and in God's vision... will grow.

Jesus, in this most vulnerable moment, holds fast to his identity... and to his purpose... and calls us to do the same, even though it's tempting to follow the lies.

Our God, who was made human in Jesus... knows this temptation we face. God's unconditional love for us is grounded in a personal experience of the temptations and suffering that we experience all the time.

So when we cry out... in our moments of weakness... when we face temptation... whether we falter or hold fast... we remain beloved... we are still washed with grace, redeemed, and claimed as God's own...

We are always being made new and always being called into a vision for a beloved community that is bigger than our own wants and needs... a vision that includes flourishing not only for ourselves but for all our neighbors.

This time in the season of Lent offers us the opportunity for our own spiritual growth... a time for reflection, repentance, and renewal... a time to practice resilience in the face of temptation... a time to remember who we are as followers of our God in Christ Jesus.

This is a time to reestablish our footing... to ground ourselves in God's love and grace and mercy... and in our place of belonging in God's community... God's kingdom... God's new creation that is arriving but not yet here.

It is okay... to be tested... it is okay to face temptation... to face our devils... we all do. It is part of the human experience... there's no shame in it.

The devil will tell you to isolate... to pull you away from others...because when you are alone, it's easier to forget who you are, and whose you are.

But when we are grounded in God's neighborhood... God's loving community... that calls us each to be our best selves... rooted in the body of Christ and committed to living in ways that reflect that love... then we know we will not have to try and overcome those lies alone.

The season of Lent calls us back into God's love... back to that which sustains and supports us on our spiritual journey.

This vision of beloved community that Jesus invites us into... well, it may sound like the land of make-believe from Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, but truly... this beloved community... *God's neighborhood*... comes a little closer each time we live into God's vision for us...

...each time we honor the inherent value and dignity of all our neighbors, as well as our own... and hold them, and ourselves, with the same love that God holds for us.

It's not the land of make-believe... it is who we are created to be.

Amen.