

**FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT**  
**Year C     February 17, 2013**

**Theme: “No and Hell no!”**

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A southern Baptist preacher tells the story of inviting his 84 year old teacher and mentor to deliver the sermon at his ordination celebration.

He said the sermon was a roaring success with people applauding and “amen-ing” throughout.

At the church yard picnic following everyone congratulated the veteran preacher on a powerful message for the beginner.

But when the new preacher walked his mentor back to his car at the end of the day, the old man laid his bible atop his car, placed a hand on each of the young man’s shoulders and said:

“The real message I have for you today, my boy, is this: You have to learn when to say “no” and when to say “Hell no.””

With that, he retrieved his bible, got in his car and drove away.

“You have to learn when to say “no” and when to say “Hell no.””

That sounds like a pretty good commentary on the story of Christ’s Testings in the Desert by the Devil as well as a thematic for this First Sunday of Lent.

To the devil’s testings Jesus said “No, no and hell no.”

In each one he took a stand for what mattered most to him and what would guide the course of his life and ministry.

His “no’s” were the basic moral choices which formed the structure on which he built his life as a child of God.

And though his responses to the devil were in the negative, they did clearly did not make him thereby a negative and dour person.

Every “No” became a “Yes” to God:

---no to bread from stones: but yes to the soul nourishing word of God;

---no to power and glory for himself: but yes to giving himself in service to the hungry and sick, the sinners and the outcast;

---no to testing God: but yes to complete trust in God, even at the moment of death.

Thus a thematic for this First Sunday, this opening weekend of Lent: “No, no and Hell no!”

These words challenge us to consider our moral foundations: to what do we say “no” and to what do we say “Hell no”?

Many situations test us requiring us to make moral choices, some of these choices are highly personal or familial, others are more social and thus political.

Let’s follow the Gospels lead and try to put these choices into testing story form.

The devil sat down at the bar next to Christian and said: “That blonde on the other side is really cute, isn’t she?”

“She sure is,” said Christian.

“Her drink is nearly empty. You could buy her a refill,” noted the devil.

“My wife’s at home with our two kids, I don’t know,” thought Christian.

The devil went into the dressing room with the high school junior Christian and said: You need this \$1300 dress if you are going to blow away all the other girls at this year's prom. You have got to have it.

Christian said: Do I have to have this dress?

Christian had been at her computer for an hour when again she saw how she could change just a couple of entries to make her own report look so much better than everyone else on the team; no one would ever catch it in all the data. Should she just do it?

They all sat together in the room and heard the report: unmanned drones were being used by their own government to kill suspected terrorists – suspected terrorists now, not convicted; women, children and other innocents who happened to be in the way were also being killed.

How did they feel about their tax dollars being used this way?

The devil texted Christian and his buddies to meet at Bob's house – PARTY, he typed in all caps.

That usually meant Bob's Mom was away for the night and had unlocked the liquor cabinet before she left.

Now Christian and his buddies – guys and girls -- were all 15 and 16.

Where would Christian be spending his Saturday night?

Clear regulations specified what to do with this tanker truck full of drilling waste water. The devil said: "The treatment plant is a long way away, it's late in the day and it is expensive to haul this stuff over there. No one is going to see you dump it out here in this storm sewer. Let it rip, man."

"I don't know," said Christian, the driver.

The devil said: “You’re paying enough taxes. Too many people are mooching off government. Don’t listen to any talk about social programs for the poor.”

Then the Christians heard a report from the United Nations which said that the child poverty rate in the USA at 22% was almost twice as high as in Japan and Germany and higher than every other industrialized Western country except Mexico.

And the Christians began to wonder if all the other nations can do it why can’t we?

When, like Jesus, do we tell the devil “No!” and to what do him “Hell no!”

Our choices reflect the moral character of our lives.

This season of Lent gives us opportunity to reflect on that moral character, to make changes if necessary and to come to Easter ready to recommit ourselves to the way of Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, when do we say “no” and when do we say “Hell no”?