Cycle C - The First Sunday of Lent
Listen to Your Gifts!
Luke 4:1-13

A country judge was about to swear in the witnesses for a trial, but no one could find the Bible. So the judge sent for old Ed, the county clerk, who taught Sunday school and was just about the finest Christian anybody knew. “Ed,” said the judge, "you've taught more of the Bible to more people than all the bibles in this town. So I want you to stand right here." And with that the witnesses stepped forward one by one, raised their right hands, and were sworn in - with their left hands squarely on the very bald head of old Ed, the county clerk!

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We've gathered here yet again, because we want to make something special of our lives - as old Ed did, but we know that the temptation to cut corners can sneak up on us. “Who’ll know in a hundred years!” we say to ourselves. “Just once won't matter. We’ll make it up next time. No big deal.” But little things add up. Days grow into years. Tiny brush strokes become whole paintings, and life patterns get settled without our noticing.

That's why we observe Lent every year. It's a time for putting down our paint brushes and stepping back to get a good look at the big picture we’ve made. The church suggests three strategies for improving our vision. The first is *prayer* - not *saying* prayers, just being quiet and attentive to the Spirit, who gives the gift of sight to those who calm their hearts and make themselves ready to see.

Fasting is part of this calming process: going without food or drink, a nap or a golf game or whatever. But what does that achieve? Do we "make points" with God by making ourselves miserable? No! We go-without purposefully: to make a quiet space, where we can see what the Lord sees and hear what his Spirit has been telling us all along. And there’s another reason we go without: it’s so that we’ll have something to give.

And that brings us to *almsgiving:* acting on what we learned when we quieted our hearts. Almsgiving takes us beyond our usual preoccupation with ourselves - with having, getting and winning. It focuses on others and *their* needs.

Almsgiving sometimes means visiting the sick, feeding the poor, or comforting the sad. Sometimes it means giving the gift of silence when words could hurt, or alternately, speaking tough words with love. It could mean giving the gift of our time by going *alone* to our desk or our lab to prepare tomorrow’s class or to draw a step closer to some cure. Almsgiving always starts with remembering that everything we have is gift, and that every gift is meant to be shared. Listen to

your gifts!

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You can build a life that "glows in the dark" and gives light to all around. Will that happen? Nothing is certain in this life, but the habits of listening-prayer, purposeful going-without, and focused almsgiving can make it more likely. They'll help you see more clearly where you are and where your gifts are calling you. Listen to that call, and know that the Lord who gave you life will be with you at every step of the way.