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# Spiritual Checkup

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A Sermon By  
The Rev. Andrew W. Walter

March 5, 2017  
Grace Episcopal Church  
Silver Spring, Maryland

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The First Sunday in Lent  
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*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.*

Matthew 4:1-2

Like many people, once a year, I have a physical. I go to the doctor, get measured and weighed, poked and prodded, and for most of my life, I've been happy to do it. Some people don't like doctors, but I was never one of them. My doctor is a really great guy, and I always enjoy seeing him. We usually spend part of our time together catching up, talking about his work, my ministry, how our children are doing. Plus, for the most part, he regularly gives me a clean bill of health. "You're doing good," he would say, "just keep it up."

But, recently, I have been more reluctant to have my physical. It's nothing against my doctor – he is still a terrific guy. I've just been worried about what he might find.

At some point in life, our bodies start to reveal our age. The years and miles begin to add up. We stop growing up and start growing out. The little aches and pains don't go away like they used to do. We can't see quite as well or hear quite as well. We go into a restaurant and can't read the menu by the one little candle sitting on the table, and we can't hear the person sitting right next to us, over the all noise coming from the bar.

I began experiencing those symptoms a few years ago, which is when I realized: I didn't want see my doctor anymore, because I was anxious about what he might say. Suddenly, I felt like my parents, who never, ever wanted to go to the doctor, and never, ever did go to the doctor, unless it was absolutely necessary. But then, my wife said I still had to go. Having a physical was important, she said. It's how we take care of ourselves. We need to be proactive with our health, and an annual check-up is good for our physical well-being. So, I continue to have my annual physical, not only because my wife told me I had to, but because, as we all would probably acknowledge, what she said is true.

It's not just our physical health that needs an examination from time to time, though; our spiritual health does, too. Every once and a while, we all need spiritual check-up, a time set aside to consider our life of faith, how we are doing in our relationships with God, and each other, and the world around us. Like an annual physical, a spiritual check-up would be good for our overall well-being, ensuring we are centered and grounded, living the kind of life we want to live. A spiritual check-up would be good for of us.

Luckily, the Bible offers some guidelines on having a spiritual examination: Moses spent forty days on the mountain, talking with God and listening to God, as God gave the law. The people of Israel spent forty years in the wilderness, questioning God and challenging God, as they wandered towards the Promised Land. And, as we heard in today's Gospel story, Jesus spent forty days and

forty nights in the wilderness, during which he had to ask himself important questions about his relationship with God: what is was and what he wanted it to be.

The season of Lent is our chance to ask those same important questions. Lent is a period of special devotion, a time of reflection and examination, when we are encouraged to focus on our relationship with God and consider if that relationship is going the way we want. It's a time to weigh our spiritual health and vitality: acknowledge where we are in our life of faith, openly and honestly; decide where we'd like be; and then, recommit to getting there. Lent is an opportunity for us to live a richer, fuller life by strengthening our connection with God.

This year, the season of Lent is starting pretty late, later than it normally does, but, in a way, it is coming at just the right moment, because we all could use a spiritual check-up right now. The last few months have been emotional for everyone. We can't stop talking about what is happening in this country, and yet, when I meet with people, they tell me they are tired by what is happening. They're exhausted, stressed, just can't take it anymore. People feel drained.

On the surface that means physically, but if we are honest with ourselves, it really means emotionally and spiritually. A lot of us are spiritually rundown right now, and that is a worrisome place to be because, when we are feeling that way, we are not at our best. We are less open, less tolerant, less understanding, less willing to listen. It is no surprise the devil appeared to Jesus when Jesus was tired and hungry, because the devil knows that is when we are the most vulnerable, the most likely to listen, the most likely to be tempted into doing something or saying something we'll regret.

So, we all could use a spiritual check-up right now, and as a way of initiating that, as a way for us to enter into the season of Lent, I want to ask three questions this morning. I encourage you to ponder them, openly and honestly, as a way of measuring your spiritual health, a way of taking your spiritual vital signs.

First, are you continuing in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers? In other words, are you praying and worshipping on a consistent basis, coming to church to get to know other people and to get to know God?

Second, do you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? This doesn't mean only the people who look like you, or sound like you, act like you, or agree like you. This included people who are different from you, as well, people who disagree with you, because, with God, all persons means ALL persons.

Finally, are you striving for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being? Another way of asking that is: Are you working, in some way, some visible, tangible way to bring the kingdom of God a little closer?

If you are like me, the answer to one of those questions, maybe even more than one of those questions, is probably no, or at least, not what it could be or not what it should be. And, if that is true, it's okay. There is no guilt here. God does not do guilt. Our answers to those questions are

what they are. But, if we want to make a change in our lives, if we want to live differently, we can.

We can spend more time in prayer and worship than we do watching the news, or reading the latest headlines. We can pray for people who differ from us. We can get down on our knees and pray for that person who annoys us, frustrates us, angers us, drives us completely crazy until we don't know what to do, praying for that person by name and thanking God for creating that person. And, we can get involved in some work or ministry that will make our community and our world a better place, fighting for what we believe in, using every ounce of our breath, standing up for our values. We can do that; we can do any of that; we can do it, if we choose to do it...

Not long ago, I actually had my physical for the year, and as I sat in the examination room, watching my doctor review my tests on his computer, I could hear him say, "Good. Good. Good."

And, they he went, "eeeewww."

"Your cholesterol is too high," he said, pulling a little information card from his pocket, "and according to this table, with your blood pressure and weight, you have a 4% chance of having a cardiac 'event' in the next five years."

Now, I didn't know what he meant by a "cardiac event," but I knew I didn't want to find out.

So, we spent time talking about my diet, what it should be, what it shouldn't be, and I've been trying to follow his advice: no cheeseburgers, no french fries, eat more green and salads. I haven't been perfect, but I've been trying. And, you know what? I feel different. I feel better. I have more energy. I'm living a healthier life, and it feels good.

Lent offers us the same opportunity with our spiritual lives. Forty days to focus on God. Forty days to feel different. Forty days to make a change. Forty days to live a healthier, better life. It'll feel good for all of us. Amen.