

## Luke 4 1-13

The Spirit landed on the beloved Son as a dove. And becomes a screeching hawk that drives him out into the wilderness. He is tempted by the devil for forty days. It is easy to read over that. We only listen in to the last three temptations. The time in the wilderness was a forty day time of struggle and spiritual battle. This is not about a gloomy afternoon in Jesus' life. It is about being tempted day after day, week after week. Forty days takes us back to the beginning of the year. We need to think of a long time of spiritual struggle.

Last Sunday we heard the Father say to Jesus, 'you are my beloved Son, in you I am well-pleased'. We heard the Father say to us, 'you are my beloved sons and daughters, in you I am well-pleased'. And maybe, as we walked out the door and into our week, we were plunged straight into a time of struggle and spiritual battle and temptation.

It is hard to say just where temptations come from:

*The Scriptures variously characterize the power of evil in the world: tendencies within ourselves; a personal being outside ourselves, apparently a powerful angel gone astray; a cosmic power; and organized forces arrayed against the will of God for the world. In whatever images or concepts, Scripture agrees with experience that there is in us and among us strong opposition to love, health, wholeness, and peace. Being committed to the way of God in the world does not exempt one from the struggle. In fact, it is those who are most engaged in the way of God who seem to experience most intensely the opposition of evil. If Jesus struggled, who is exempt? Nor did the presence of the Holy Spirit mean the absence of temptation; rather, the Spirit was the available power of God in the contest. ( Fred Craddock Interpretation Series Commentary on Luke)*

Luke tells us that Jesus' temptations come from the devil. And he has battled temptations for forty days without food. At the end of those days he is hungry. Maybe Jesus is wondering, "is **this** what it means to be the beloved Son of God?"

Here is the first temptation:

"If you are the Son of God, and you are hungry, tell these stones to become bread!"

If you are the Son of God, you shouldn't be in need of anything, use your power to meet your needs!

Jesus answers, "It is written, "Man does not live on bread alone".

In other words, "There is more to life than bread or stuff or things" "My deepest need is to live in trust and love with my Father". "I will trust my Father to care for me even if it feels like I am starving to death". I don't find life in bread, or stuff, or material things, or anything I might buy or consume. My life is safe with my Father."

The devil led him up to a high place to see all the kingdoms of the world. He said, "Here is an offer you can't refuse!" "I will give you all their authority and splendour, because it is all mine and I can give it to anyone I want. All you need to do is worship me!"

It's a pathetic temptation built on false assumptions and promises.

First, the assumption that the power and splendour of the world is what we really want and need.

Our world is full of people who have more power and wealth than they know what to do with and yet are empty and lonely inside. (cf Tiger) We need to be careful about stereotypes. The poor are not always 'poor, but happy'. The rich are not always 'rich but miserable'.

And yet, we all know that this great trade-off, really is a lie. The wealth and power of the world is not what is to be desired.

Second, 'it has been given to me'? Really? One of the sad stories to come out of Vancouver in the last few weeks was about a man who sold a family a place to stay so they could watch their son compete at the Olympics. It turned out the condo didn't really belong to the guy who took their money.

What the devil offers is never really the devil's to give in the first place.

Third, 'I can give it to anyone I want to'. Really?

The devil is a grasper and a consumer. CS Lewis pictured the devil as consuming the souls and lives of those who fall for this temptation. Full disclosure here would be, "if you worship me these things will be yours and you will be mine!"

Jesus fights back in a way that is open to us too. He uses the word of God.

"It is written, worship the Lord your God and serve Him only". It doesn't matter what anyone else promises, worship the Lord, serve Him, trust that he will supply what you need.

Finally the devil led Jesus to Jerusalem, back to the temple, back to the place where Jesus had been redeemed as a baby, where old people had prophesied over him and where he had discussed great questions with the teachers when he was twelve.

The devil uses Jesus' favourite phrase, "It is written". It feels like mockery to hear that from the devil. "It is written, it is written... ok Mr. "It is written" If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here".

"Throw yourself down from here, and let all the crowds below see that you are the Son of God when they see the angels come to rescue you. Or, don't you trust the Scriptures?"

Jesus replies; "It says, don't put the Lord your God to the test".

A life of faith means stepping out and following and trusting that God really will be with us even in scary places. It does not mean taking foolish risks and challenging God to prove that he can protect and care for us and keep us safe.

If someone who has always been reliable says, "I love you, I will always come to help you", it is obscene to test that love on purpose. A promise of love from a trustworthy person needs to be accepted with trust. God's promise of love needs to be accepted with trust.

When the devil is finished all this tempting he slinks away from Jesus, "until an opportune time". Luke leaves a note of tension in the story, to remind us that the devil is still prowling around. We will see the devil at work again near the end of this gospel.

So what do we do with this story? How does it help us to be followers of Jesus?

The number '40' is an important clue to us about what is happening here. In his spiritual battle, Jesus is living out the struggles of his people **for** his people.

When God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, they gave in to the temptation to fear and so their journey became a 40 year stretch, going around in circles in the wilderness.

Both times that Moses went up the mountain to receive the ten commandments, he was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights, praying for mercy for the sinful people before the Lord.

In his own spiritual struggle the prophet Elijah was fed by an angel with food that gave him strength for forty days and forty nights.

When Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil he was doing battle against temptation for his people. The people of Israel and you and me. In this he is unique from all other leaders. Other leaders send their people into battle on their behalf. Jesus goes into battle for us.

In our struggles with temptations we win some and we lose some. We draw on the strength of Jesus and we tell the truth, we honour a tough commitment. But we also fall for the lie, we falter in our trust, we forget who we are. Jesus was **just as human as you or me** and yet, he resisted every temptation. And when we put our trust in him we are given credit for his victory. That is his gift of grace.

Now, again, how can this story help us to be followers of Jesus?

1. We may be inspired and encouraged by our Saviour who knows temptations from the inside out. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that we have a Saviour who is sympathetic to us in our struggles because he has been there. (Hebrews 4:14-16)
2. Don't be surprised or thrown off balance when the Spirit leads us into the wilderness. Don't be surprised or thrown off by intense times of trial or tempting. Paul writes that there are no 'new' temptations, just the same old ones that show up in different clothes. (1 Cor. 10:13) (no one, not even Jesus is exempt!)
3. Some of our temptations are familiar. It may help us to name them and look for Scripture that we can draw on. If we memorize Scripture we will have it with us at all times. Each verse Jesus used in Luke comes from Deuteronomy.
  - a. Are we tempted to try to meet our deepest needs in some store? "I do not live by bread alone".
  - b. Tempted to sell ourselves for the power and wealth of the world?  
"Worship the Lord your God and serve him only".
  - c. Tempted to take risks with our lives, or to even take our life, counting on God to save us from ourselves? "Do not put the Lord your God to the test".
4. Times of testing, 'forty day trials' will come. And they will also go. If we stick close to Jesus, if we trust in the power of the Spirit and the Word, if we keep listening to the voice of our Father, he will prove his love and faithfulness to us.
5. Even in our trials, win or lose, sink or swim, we are still the beloved sons and daughters of God. Never forget that.

6. Trust that God uses faithfulness and obedience to do amazing things in us. Remember Bread from stones? God could make bread out of stones. But through Jesus, God takes hearts of stone and makes us generous to provide bread to share with the hungry.

May the Lord be gracious to you.

May the Lord be gracious to me.

And all God's people said, Amen.