

Are You Tempted
Luke 4:1-13
March 10, 2019 – First Sunday in Lent

I've told you a couple of times, as we have been journeying through the Gospel of Luke, that we would return to "the temptations" the first Sunday of Lent. Well, here we are. If you have taken one of our bible studies covering the Gospels of Jesus, you probably know that most scholars feel the writers of Matthew and Luke probably knew Mark's Gospel, and, in large part, based their writings on Mark. All three writers place the temptation story immediately after Jesus baptism; and that's significant.

If we consider Mark for a moment, we read that, at his baptism, Jesus hears a voice from heaven, "You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased." Can you imagine? Can you put yourself in Jesus place having experienced this hugely spiritual moment, having actually heard a heavenly voice, having actually experienced a heavenly call? What would you do with this?

Mark tells us what Jesus did with it. Jesus said to himself, "I need to get away. I need to sort this out. I need some time to myself." And so Mark's temptation story is quite simple:

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty day, tempted by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him." (Mark 1:12-13)

You see, Mark is devoid of any of the details of the temptation that we just heard in Luke. Was Jesus tempted? Of course he was; and I have always said the greatest temptation of Jesus was to simply ignore the call of God, ignore all this "Son of God" stuff, return to the carpenter's shop, return to business as usual. That would certainly be my temptation. But the call to the Son of God was strong.

So let's get back to Luke. Luke provides more detail about this struggle between good and evil. Indeed, the struggle in Luke is truly an issue of kinship: what sort of Son will Jesus be to the Father?

First we note the very significant role of the Holy Spirit. Luke tells us that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit"; and, "the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness where for forty days he was tempted." Now, I always tell people not to take numbers in the bible literally. Forty days typically simply means a long time. Still, it's not insignificant that Lent is 40 days long. (Store that away. We'll come back to that.) So Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days, and during this time he fasted. Now, I don't know what or how much Jesus ate; and the physical aspects of Jesus' diet are really not important. What is important is that Jesus was hungry.

Hungry for food? Hungry for answers? Hungry for direction for his life? Yes. . . Jesus was hungry; and up pops the devil. Up pops the very source of temptation, the source of evil. And Luke tells us of three temptations, three tests, if you will. The three seem to progress both from “easy” to “hard” and from “obvious” to “devious.”

First, the devil tests Jesus strength over physical needs. Jesus is “famished.” Note the test: “*If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.*” The temptation is not just to eat. The temptation is: “So you think you’re the Son of God. Prove it.” But Jesus honors the Father above his own needs. He quotes the book of Deuteronomy: “One does not live by bread alone.” What Luke does not report, and what every first century reader would know is the rest of that verse from Deuteronomy: “One does not live by bread alone buy by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” (Deut 8:3)

Next the devil tempts Jesus to switch allegiance, and his sonship along with it. He tells Jesus, I will give you all authority over all the earth, if you will only worship me. And Jesus again quotes Deuteronomy: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.” (Deut. 6:13)

So the devil returns to his “If you’re the Son of God, prove it” tactic. This time he tries to beat Jesus at his own game, by quoting scripture. He tells Jesus to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple, and he quotes Psalms: “He will command his angels to protect you; on their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.” (Psalm 91:11-12) And Jesus again quotes Deuteronomy: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”(Deut 6:16)

And Luke tells us that the devil departed from him until on opportune time. Indeed there is one more temptation in store for Jesus, and that will come in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of his arrest.

But what about us? What about you? What about me? We have entered our forty days of Lent. This past Wednesday, on Ash Wednesday, I invited you to enter Lent seeking an every closer relationship with the Holy, with God, with the Living Christ. But what are your temptations?

The first temptation might be the same temptation that I mentioned as that temptation of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel – the temptation to just forget the whole thing. Forget that Lent calls us to a time of repentance, a time of turning closer to Christ. The first temptation for all of us may be simply to continue with business as usual. Why should Lent be any different. Things are okay as they are.

But I ask, what can coming closer to Christ mean for you? Does is mean strengthening your prayer life? Beginning and ending every day in prayer? Are you aware that every week I post “Prayers of the Week” on the church website, new prayers every week, a morning and evening prayer every week. I personally print those prayers on a small piece of paper and keep them by my bedside so I can

pray them every morning and every evening. I have sometimes suggested that you pray before meals. When I go to Panera's for lunch, I pray before I begin to eat, not out loud, and not long; but I still try to remember to thank God for the blessings of food. I also try to thank God for the love he has shown to both Ginny and me. And, having said all this, I tell you that my prayer life could still use a boost, as I seek to pray more for those who are ill, those who are hungry, those in need. And, indeed, I now pray regularly for our church and our denomination.

Some people maintain a tradition of "giving something up for Lent." Maybe it's desserts or chocolate or soda pop or alcohol. Indeed the sacrifice can be meaningful, and it certainly exemplifies our own temptations, as we are tempted to break our promise, to cheat on our "fast." As someone who tries to be health conscious, I would rather see Lent be a time to start a new lifestyle. Don't *just* give up something for Lent. Let Lent be the time to start a healthier lifestyle that will continue on into the summer and beyond.

Instead of giving something up for Lent, some people "add something for Lent," doing additional volunteer work for the church or the food pantry or Habitat for Humanity or some other organization. Others make an extra sacrifice, in order to donate additional money to the church or a favorite charity. And again, there is temptation. . . temptation to let the work, the donation, the sacrifice slide by the wayside about three weeks into Lent.

So what do we do with the temptations? We do what Jesus did. We say "no" to the evil one; and we turn to God. Jesus' words to the devil from Deuteronomy are also words for us:

We do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Bible study is another meaningful Lenten discipline.

We worship the Lord our God. (Hear my previous sermons in that.) We do not worship temporal things. We worship the Lord our God, and serve only him.

And we do not put the Lord our God to the test. You know, sometimes we do that. Sometimes we say, "God, if you want me to do such and such, show me," when all along we know what we should be doing.

Now, if you feel like I've just laid a heavy load on you, if you feel like I've just suggested that you should take all the fun out of your life, I have good news for you.

We have a loving and a merciful God; and there is no greater joy than to experience and to share the love of God. God does not seek to burden us; God

seeks to love us. And so, I suggest that whatever you do this Lent, whatever temptations you are called to resist, you do it with hearts wide open to the love of God.

This Lent, may the love of the Living God fill your hearts with warmth and peace and joy; as together we move from the darkness of Ash Wednesday to the glory of Easter Sunday. Praise be to God for the gift of his Son. May each of us follow in the light of his path though the season of Lent and even for ever more.

Let us pray. . .

Holy Lord,
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from all evil,
for you alone are holy.
Amen.

Rev. Mark L. Steiger, Pastor
North Olmsted United Methodist Church