

“Tested, Tried, Tempted, and Ready for Action!”

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Scriptures: Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, departed from the Jordan full of the Holy Spirit and was guided by the Spirit into the wilderness, where he was put to the test by the devil for forty days. He ate nothing at all during that whole time; and when it was all over, he was famished.

The devil said to him, “To prove you’re God’s son, order these stones to become bread.”

Jesus responded to him, “It is written, ‘Human beings are not to live on bread alone.’”

Then the devil took Jesus up and in an instant showed him all the empires of the civilized world. The devil said to him, “I’ll bestow on you authority over all this and the glory that comes with it; understand, it has been handed over to me, and I can give it to anyone I want. So, if you will pay homage to me, it will all be yours.”

Jesus responded, “It is written, ‘You are to pay homage to the Lord your God, and you are to revere him alone.’”

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and set Jesus on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, “To prove you’re God’s son, jump off from here; remember, it is written, ‘To his heavenly messengers he will give orders to protect you,’ and ‘with their hands they will catch you, so you won’t even stub your toe on a stone.’”

And in response Jesus said to him, “It is said, ‘You are not to put the Lord your God to the test.’”

So when the devil had tried every kind of test, he let Jesus alone for the time being.

Sermon:

This morning’s passage is actually the prequel to the passages that I used for my previous two Sermons.

So kinda like the Star Wars series, I also did a sequel and then followed it with a prequel.

As we read this morning, prior to his return to Nazareth and his bold proclamation of the content of his ministry, (bringing good news to the poor, sight to the blind and freedom for the enslaved!),

Jesus had just spent 40 days in the Wilderness without food while being tempted by the devil.

This makes Luke's evolving story of Jesus follow a similar narrative path like many heroes in the the ancient world.

The hero's birth, not only fulfills the ancient prophecies but is announced with cosmic events.

This is then followed by a necessary time of testing, trial and preparation which the hero must rise above before they can start their journey.

We find this similar pattern throughout the Bible and Luke is also constantly connecting those early heroes to Jesus.

For instance the number "40!"

Where else have we heard this in the Bible?

Noah, 40 days and 40 nights of rain.

Elijah took a 40 day journey to Mt. Horeb to meet with God.

Jonah preached for 40 days before Nineveh repented.

And most clearly Jesus' 40 days in the "wilderness,"

parallels the great Exodus where the children of Israel must wander for 40 years through the wilderness

between their liberation from slavery

and before their arrival in the promised land!

But "the Wilderness" also factors in quite often in the Bible.

It was where many of the great prophets had to flee to to avoid the wrath of Kings.

There they also rested, were fed and restored.

King David too hid out in the wilderness while being hunted by Saul.

Such allusions to past stories allow the author to tell their audience,

"Hey you know this Jesus guy is a lot like Moses, or Elijah, or David or John the Baptist.

But then Luke can also make the contrasting point that Jesus also transcends them!

Even the fact that the devil tempted Jesus three times is significant since we know that other important things in the Bible come in threes

ie: three days from death to resurrection

and the Trinity, which are pretty big thing for Christians!

So let's look at these three temptations a bit closer.

Temptation # 1: Turn these stones into bread.

One thing is for sure, there are a whole lot of rocks in the desert!
and so no lack of raw material for Jesus to work with.

This would have also been a very personal

and the most immediate of the three temptations, since we are told
that after 40 days without eating that he was “famished!”

But come on, when you really think about it, this temptation

seemed a bit lame, especially by one said to be so devious.

Of course God’s son can turn stones into bread, the devil knew that!

And since they were in the “wilderness” no one else
would have been there to witness it anyway!

The point for Jesus’ wilderness experience was to fast as preparation

for the next stage of what would be a very difficult journey.

It was not a time to merely to deprive himself for the sake of deprivation.

Fasting is a time to draw one’s full attention

to that which is the true source of one’s life and power.

The purpose of a fast is not to think about what we have given up,

or be grumpy and pine for the moment we can indulge again.

Jesus actually instructed that we are not to look or act

in any way that might tip people off that we are actually fasting.

Any way the fast is over, the forty days are complete

and food will be procured easily enough one way or another.

But the fact remains that like Jesus we are all beings

that are composed of both flesh and soul and we must feed both!

God is in charge and unlike Satan, God is the “Good Father”

who gives his children real bread and not stones!

Now a more serious temptation, if you ask me,

would be the power to turn all those stones around him into bread

and thus feed all those who were starving in Palestine!

So why did Jesus not see this possibility?

Well, in fact Jesus did, but just a bit later on,

Jesus did manage to feed several huge crowds of folks.

In one case, however, it all started when a small boy willingly shared

what little he had, two fish and five small loaves for those in need.

But by the end of the meal a great amount of food was left uneaten.

So perhaps the problem isn’t with the bounty that God’s

good earth can supply but with how we humans distribute it?!

Temptation # 2: "I'll give you control of all of the civilized world"

In round two the devil certainly upped his game.

And again, of course, Jesus said, "NO!"

After all, as Christians know, Jesus was totally apolitical!

He had no interest in telling nations and empires how to run things
and he certainly had no interest in running an earthly empire.

He was, as we know meek and mild - a lowly shepherd
who avoided conflict and confrontations.

But I say, "why not?"

After all who better than Jesus to actually be in charge?!

I'd support, "Jesus for President!"

But do ya think he'd run?

Make no doubt about it, Jesus did challenge the Roman Empire
and their local lackeys who controlled things in Palestine.

But I'm also guessing that those later crowds who sang "Hosannas"
and waved palm branches would have been a harder temptation!

After all, the Temple at that moment, would have been ripe for the taking.

But as we know from history Empires have always managed to be
horribly tragic affairs, especially for the poor and the weak.

But who among us have not entertained the thought,

"But boy if only I were in charge then things would be different!"

Or who hasn't at times gotten caught up in the delusion

that if only a certain political party, or candidate
or ideology could take control then all would be well?

Now of course I'm not saying that none of those matter
but anyone of those things alone is never enough.

But Jesus was pretty clear that the source of true power is inverted
and arises out of weakness, and through service and sacrificial love!

And lastly, come on after all, are we silly enough to forget
that the devil is just a big phony - a big liar!

It is God who created everything and so God controls all the nations!

The devil's got nothin' to offer anyone that truly lasts.

Temptation 3: "Go ahead and jump! God will catch you,
won't he?"

I like to think of this as the temptation of the spectacle or celebrity!
The temptation isn't if God will rescue Jesus or not,
but that God needs to create a spectacle to get attention!

"What a great way to get your name out there Jesus!
What a spectacle that would be!"
"You'd surely be in all the papers and even make the nightly news!
Just imagine the instagram traffic! It would certainly go viral!
And then everyone will believe you and follow you!"

But I think we all struggle with this one.
Who doesn't want to be entertained, especially on Sundays?

Folks flock to megachurches in the suburbs
surrounded conveniently by shopping malls.

Church growth seminars promote the latest fads
to get folks through the doors and into the pews!
But is this true faith? Will mere spectacles, entertaining worship services
and following the latest fads really sustain one's faith?

A true, sustaining faith, I believe, is based upon a growing relationship
with God and by belonging in a community of deepening faith.
And most of us know that that kind of growth isn't always easy
or pretty, or comfortable, hip and convenient.

And finally, Jesus' final reply comes across to me as a bit of a taunt.
"Come on Satan, you don't really want to test me, now do you?"
I'm mean really? Come on dude, step off!"

Jesus was/is God's son and part of an infinitely powerful trinity.
He's in constant communion and contact with that source of real power
and just spent the past 40 days pumping spiritual iron in the desert.
Yeah, I don't think that that was the best time to mess with him.

Wisely for him, the devil backed down in order to wait
for a more convenient time to take another shot.
Which, as we know from reading the rest of the story
he does take on a particular Friday during the spring.

So ya, Jesus did take the leap, but not from the top of the temple
but from a cruel crucifix and into a tomb for the dead.

But neither the tomb nor death, nor even the devil could keep him down.
No doubt the Devil thought that he had won?

Until Easter morning which we now know that God won
and thus, will always ultimately win.

We hold onto the truth that love triumphs over the grave!
Love wins over lies, deception and temptations to give in or give up!
But the question I have for you this morning, a temptation perhaps, is,

“Are you willing to jump into those loving arms of God?”

“Are you willing to leap from the edge and all those demonic forces,
or are they just excuses, that are holding you back?!”

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