

Sermon – Temptation of Jesus Luke 4:1-13 – First Sunday of Lent

Today is the first Sunday of Lent. There is a conscious shift in the Church Year, calling us to reflect and ponder on our faith – our relationship with God –

In today's reading we hear about the temptation of Jesus and underneath the story lies a strong message from him about putting God and our relationship with him above all else. And here we can take a closer look at how Luke makes this point.

Where this story is set in the Gospel plays a significant part.

By the time we begin to hear about the temptation of Jesus, Luke has truly established Jesus' identity as the son of God.

But then Luke makes a deeper point – sandwiched in between this reading – and Jesus's Baptism, Luke lays out the genealogy of Jesus which traces his lineage all the way back to Adam – Son of God – the first born.

By identifying Adam as the first born – and situating right before the account of the temptation of Jesus – Luke is bringing to mind the story of the fall in Genesis and making a *comparison* between the temptation of Adam and Jesus' own temptations – but Luke is ALSO making a *contrast* between the two.

Another thing – this temptation story also comes BEFORE Jesus's sermon at the synagogue in Nazareth where he lays out what his ministry will be about – bringing good news to the poor, bringing spiritual freedom and salvation. This temptation narrative is laying out what Jesus's ministry is most definitely NOT.

No, the loss of God's presence by the fall of Adam and Eve succumbing to temptation is redeemed by Jesus through his resistance to temptation – Jesus is beginning of restoration of life lived out in God's presence – not God's absence – in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus intentionally disrupts his life when he enters into the wilderness for 40 days. He is stripped back from everything and is left in the stillness to contemplate and be with his Father. Sometimes our lives are disrupted: weather, illness, job loss, etc Sometimes disruption to the normal everyday is welcome and sometimes it's not. How can we allow our lives to be disrupted positively, so that we can realign our priorities and make space for God?

Remember how Adam is tempted by Eve to eat an apple? Well look how Jesus is being tempted by the devil to use his God given power to make bread out of stone in order to satisfy his hunger.

Jesus quotes scripture from Deuteronomy – 'One does not live by bread alone..' – He refuses to give in, despite being desperately hungry – just as he will refuse to give in despite desperate physical agony on the cross – Jesus resists temptation number one.

Temptation number two is resisted – worldly power and prestige is not what Jesus is about – he is about saving others – not asserting self-importance as a political and

military ruler – His messianic mission is not of this world – his kingdom is of the nature of peace, not war – It's God's ways we follow – not the devil. Again some scripture from Deuteronomy – 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only'

The third temptation? Jumping from the temple in Jerusalem to be saved by God might be interpreted as simply showing some great magic trick like many magicians of his day. On a deeper note, this also might be alluding to the crucifixion when Jesus was being cajoled to save himself – with the onlookers taking the role of the devil... Jesus is not having any of it – again from Deuteronomy he says 'Do not put your Lord God to the test'. But not before the devil has used some scripture himself 'He will command his angels concerning you to protect you...' It's good to remember that 'even the devil can quote scripture' – we must respect it and use scripture wisely.

This whole forty day experience echoes the forty days Moses spent writing Israel's covenant, and the forty years the Israelites spent in the wilderness...

What of our own forty days in the wilderness? Have you been there – are you there? The wilderness is that space when God seems remote – our resistance is low and comfort beckons through acting out an earthy desire – to whet the appetite – to puff up the ego – or to become self-satisfied. The wilderness can be a lonely place. It is a place where we might think nobody knows what we do – or perhaps nobody even cares – not even God. It's times like these when we can make rash judgements and fall short of being the kind of person our faith calls us to be...

What can we do during those times – how can we resist temptation – and find sustenance in the wilderness times life will no doubt bring from time to time?

Well looking at the first sentence we are shown the way in which Jesus managed to do so – 'Jesus, it says - full of the Holy Spirit – was LED by the spirit in the wilderness....' – he was guided – he wasn't alone after all – the Spirit was Holy and was with him – THE COMFORTER NOT THE TEMPTER - – right to the end when Jesus – we are told – 'filled with the power of the Spirit,' returned to Galilee and was praised by everyone – and again when he was preaching in the synagogue Jesus himself proclaimed that 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.'

And there we have it – being filled with the Holy Spirit that was in Christ Jesus is how we resist the best we can and follow his ways the best we can.

Lent calls us to prayer, fasting and the giving of alms which are all ways of deepening that sense of living in relationship with God, with ourselves and with others. Prayer deepens our relationship with God – fasting deepens the relationship with ourselves – and alms giving deepens our sense of relationship with others – going beyond ourselves, thinking of other's needs and doing so through the heart of a prayerful desire to do God's will – which will always be to love ourselves – to be kinder to ourselves – and to others – and in being more loving to ourselves and to others – we are then, ultimately being more loving to God.

To help you on your own Lenten pilgrimage you're invited to take part in the Bishop's Lenten call – Transforming Lent –daily readings by email – or booklet at the back.....

The Lenten wilderness can become sanctuary – a place in which we can stop running – breath in God - and take stock fearlessly, honestly, willingly - We can remember with thanksgiving those things which have brought joy... And we can pick up and take with us the sense of being in the sheltering arms of God's love as we too are filled with the Holy Spirit....

Let us pray this wilderness litany

'In the wilderness we find your grace;
You love us with an everlasting love
And we find healing and peace.

Pause

During this Lent, by surrendering to God's loving will for us we can let we can let go of those parts of our lives – of ourselves which no longer serve us well. We can forgive – we can be forgiven – wilderness becomes a place of reconciliation – of restoration of our relationships with God, ourselves and others...

Pause

In the wilderness we marvel at the grace of God
Who uses our sorrowfulness to bring renewal
Creating joy and healing from decay – fruit out of barrenness.

Pause

During this Lent In the wilderness of life we find rest in the company of Christ – in trust, we hand the burdens of life to him, finding in him refreshment from the living water and nourishment from God's Word – wilderness becomes an oasis of sustenance and rest..

pause

During this Lent, We step out into the unknown – walking with Christ to the cross in trust and faith – trust in our loving God and faith in the healing power of his Holy Spirit ...

We pray:

Holy Spirit, lead us and help us to walk with Christ in the way of self-denial; the path which guides us through the wilderness.

Holy Spirit, lead us and help us to walk with Christ in the way of sacrifice; the path which points us towards the cross.

Holy Spirit lead us and help us to walk with Christ in the way of resurrection; the path which takes us onwards to new life.

Holy Spirit lead us beyond resurrection and help us to walk with Christ in the way of his risen joy, hope and freedom and may the blessings of the wilderness fill us with the spirit of love as we go in peace to serve the world to your praise and glory.

Amen