

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, based on Luke 4

Today we have the Temptation of Christ in the Gospel.

Temptation is something we know too well.

I came across a story of 4 high school students who couldn't resist the temptation to skip morning classes. The weather was getting nicer, it was the end of the school year, and they were seniors... who happened to have a strong case of spring fever. During lunch, they showed up at school and ran into one of their morning teachers in the hallway. They told the teacher that their car had a flat tire. Much to their relief, she smiled at them and said, "Well, you missed a quiz this morning, but I will let you make it up. Seeing that it's lunchtime, come on in, grab a seat and get out a pencil and piece of paper." Still smiling, she waited till they settled down. Then she said, "First question on the quiz is --which tire was flat?" Nice...

Now that's a wise teacher. This story illustrates how succumbing to our temptation, big or small, can snowball into lies and deceit. Fortunately, this teacher called them on the carpet and perhaps taught a lesson they won't forget.

Being a Christian doesn't mean you won't be tempted, won't be faced with evil, or won't ever be free from sin. And yet we are called to contend with temptation, sin, and evil like Jesus did. Really that's the focus of this sermon. To be encouraged by how Jesus, God in human flesh, contended with evil and temptation.

In our Gospel, we have a God in Jesus Christ who faced real temptations by the devil and resisted. Jesus taught us how to resist temptation by knowing who he was, what he stood for, and by using scripture to counter the devil's empty claims.

The good news is that we are yoked to Jesus and his power over sin, death, and the devil in our baptism and faith. Christ, who faced human temptation himself is with us now through the gift of the Holy Spirit as we battle evil and temptation in our lives. Our obedience to God and God's word can be an antidote for the evil that exists around us.

In our Gospel, Jesus chooses a certain way of being in the world. And it doesn't involve the things the devil is tempting Jesus with... selfishness, the need for unlimited power, or using his divinity to show off.

Our Gospel starts off after Jesus' baptism when the Spirit Led Jesus into the wilderness. The Spirit had a purpose for sending Jesus into the wilderness. The wilderness testing will be Jesus' final preparation before his public ministry.

Wilderness in the Bible is a dry barren place. It is also the place where the Israelites wandered for 40 years after slavery in Egypt. And even in those uncertain times, God was there... providing a pillar of fire water, manna, and quail, and the 10 commandments, even though they often turned away from God to idols.

Debi Thomas, wonders in the blog, Journey with Jesus, "if these temptations of Jesus might become invitations for us — invitations to trust God's love in the barren places of our lives. Because it's one thing to trust God in retrospect, when our hardships are over. It is quite another to trust God in the moment, when the comforts and certainties of life have disappeared.

In the first temptation, the devil, diablo in Greek, challenges a famished Jesus to command a stone to become a loaf of bread. The devil attacked Jesus when he was alone and weak. Jesus counters with, "It is written one does not live by bread alone..." Deut 8:3. Jesus will not use his authority or miracle working power for personal advantage no matter how compelling the need.

2nd test. The devil tempts Jesus to have power and political control over all the kingdoms of the earth. World domination. Jesus does not accept the truth or validity of the devil's empty claims. This time Jesus quotes, Deut 6:13 "Worship the Lord your God and serve only Him." Jesus declines the need to rule any nation. His kingdom will not involve having unchecked power and control over others.

Finally, in the 3rd Temptation, the devil brought Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and told him to throw himself down... this time the devil uses scripture.. a quote from Psalm 91... that angels will come

and bear him up so he will not dash his foot against a stone. Jesus counters with Deut 6:16, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” Jesus does not need to indulge in such performances. Yes, trust in God, but do not take foolish risks, then all of a sudden cry to God for help.

The form of strength Jesus chooses to counter the devil is quite different than all our human understandings of strength. He refuses to define his ministry with the kind of power we tend to idolize as humans. His power will be made perfect in weakness... ultimately on a cross.

The good news in this text is that Jesus faced temptations just as we do, and we saw how he responded. We saw how he used God’s Word to combat the temptations he faced.

We too have the God’s Word and the Holy Spirit to help us through our wilderness times and temptations in life. Let us confront our temptations and evil in the world with boldness and confidence given to us in our faith and baptism in Jesus Christ. Amen.