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March 10, 2019

“Trials and Temptations”

Deuteronomy 26;1-11 Luke 4:1-13 Romans 10:8b-13

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE 4:1-13

Last week we read about Jesus' Transfiguration on Mount Herman when he heard his Father's voice from heaven saying, "This is my Son, listen to him. This morning we go back in time to what happened to Jesus immediately after he heard his heavenly Father's voice the first time at his baptism. Hear the word of the Lord from Luke 4:1-13:

Let's pray. O Lord, thank you for this part of your story that tells us that you were tempted in all ways that we are. Thank you that because you were tempted, you can empathize with us when we are, and can give us the power to resist temptation. This we pray in Jesus' name.

Back when I was a youth pastor, many moons ago, I took a bus load of High School students to Jekyll Island Georgia for a Youth Conference called Fun In The Son. On the Friday night of the conference I was assisting in emceeing an evening concert. The keyboard player had been at the hotel next door earlier in the day and had invited the band that was playing there to come and share a couple of tunes. I was wearing pink shorts and a white tuxedo jacket over a Hawaiian shirt, and got to play ukulele to My Girl with theTemptations.

Somehow....and I don't know how....The Temptations were able to resist the temptation to take me on the road with them.

Humorist Robert Orben has observed, "Most people want to be delivered from temptation but would still like to keep in touch." Another wag has asked, "Why is it that opportunity knocks only once, yet temptation bangs on the door constantly?" My favorite, of course, is Oscar Wilde, the playwright who wrote "The Importance of Being Earnest," who once said, "I can resist everything -- except temptation!"

When Jesus was baptized he heard the thundering voice of his heavenly Father saying, 'This is my beloved son. In him I am well pleased.' Immediately following this dramatic emotional experience Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be ... tempted.

When I think of being Spirit-led, somehow that's not what comes to mind. Yet that's where the Spirit led him and for forty days he is there, fasting and praying. It is as the end of this 40 days that these temptations arise.

For something to be a temptation it has to be a possibility. It is not a temptation for me to dunk a basketball because it is not a possibility. It is a however, a temptation for me to dunk a donut.

Each of us, at one time or another, has been tempted to do something we know we shouldn't do. Each one of us at one time or another has been tempted to stand by and not do what we know we should have done. It's not a sin to be tempted. The sin is to give in to temptation.

Notice that this period of temptation for Jesus took place, after he had fasted for 40 days, before he had done one miracle to look back on for reassurance, , before he had called out disciples to follow him, before he had preached his first sermon.

Sometimes we may not take this very seriously. We may not think Jesus was really tempted, not the way we are tempted. After all, he was Jesus! But we need to understand that the temptations of Jesus were real.

Maybe we need to rethink sin. Maybe we need to think of sin in broader categories than just "bad things done" or "good things left undone." Maybe the most uncomplicated definition of sin we could give would be our inclination to take the easy way out. Jesus temptations on the surface seem harmless enough. They are certainly not temptations to do evil. They are just temptations to take the easy way out.

Temptation number one.—“Command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” (I can make bread turn to stone when I forget to close the wrapper.) That's not a bad idea, really. Think about it. A lot of good could come from such a move. Changing stones to bread could move the world in a giant leap toward feeding the hungry masses. Thousands of lives could be saved. Isn't that worth some consideration? Think of the children we see with distended bellies. Think of the mothers who are too weak to feed their own children. Bread-making from stones could feed the world. Isn't God concerned with the hungry? Notice Jesus response. Jesus quoted scripture, “It is written, man shall not live by bread alone.”

Temptation number two. Jesus was taken up and somehow given a view of all the earthly kingdoms. -"the tempter said, “Worship me and to you I will give all authority over all earthly kingdoms.”

Don't dismiss this one too quickly, either. Think about what it would mean if Jesus really were in charge around here. If Jesus had control, there would be no need for nuclear weapons. Wealth and resources would be shared more equitably. We wouldn't need a United Nations Peace Keeping Force to ensure the fair sharing of food supplies. It would be done, by Jesus, who had the power to make it happen. Notice Jesus' response. Again Jesus quoted scripture, “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.”

Temptation number three—Jesus was taken up to the pinnacle of the temple and challenged, “Throw yourself down from here.” Noticing a pattern in Jesus'

answers the tempter decides to try quoting scripture. He said, "The scripture says God will command his angels concerning you to protect you and on their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone." (Part of a song we heard Jim sing yesterday at Pete Petersen's funeral) Again Jesus quoted scripture, "it is written, do not put the Lord your God to the test."

This temptation is to dare God to perform a dramatic rescue. Again, think of the consequences. If Jesus did this, it would show that God can be manipulated to do what we want and what we need.

These temptations were so subtle. These "harmless" temptations could lead to Jesus being King of the World immediately and easily -- no more preaching to crowds on hillsides or by lakes, no more healing all those sick bodies, no more teaching to those who seem not to understand, and, most important of all, no cross.

It would have been the easy way out and it would have lead away from Calvary and death – but it also would have led away from the empty tomb, and the death of the power of sin, and the end of that real kingdom Jesus tried so desperately to explain to his followers.

The temptation of Jesus was to choose another way other than the cross. Maybe ... maybe that is our temptation too.

The reality of evil and the results of living in a fallen world are among us almost everywhere we look. Humanity's inhumanity to individuals and groups of people has a long and sordid history. Ever since Cain murdered Abel, we have experienced evil spirits working deep within the human soul as people destroy one another. We may not understand the violence which is the result of hatred and bitterness, but we feel at the very least that we can explain crimes which philosophers categorize as moral evil, that is, evil that is caused by one person's cruelty towards another human being, or one group of people towards other groups of people or one nation of people towards another nation of people or other nations of people.

What can we say of the evil that manifests itself as illness in the lives of so many people whom we know and love? In most cases, disease cannot be categorized as moral evil, that is, evil that is caused by one person's sin towards another human being. What do we say, what do we do, when a child is afflicted with a horrible illness? The more difficult question is, what does God do in the midst of such terrible and senseless suffering? I cannot explain to you why some suffer more than others, or why some are healed of their afflictions and others are not.

I do believe that some illness is sometimes a result of people doing things that are not prescribed by God Abusing our bodies by over eating and under exercising, by overworking and under resting, or by abusing drugs or violating

relationships can bring illness and resulting pain. However, I do not believe that in every case that illness is the result of people reaping what they have sown.

There are illnesses and pain that come not as the result of our actions or God's direct acts to punish those who have strayed. I do not think that it is always the case that we feel pain because God is trying to teach us some sort of lesson that will bring us into line. To be sure God can teach us things as we deal with pain but pain is not necessarily a teaching tool. Often it is an early warning system telling us that something is wrong somewhere.

In the end, God will be victorious over evil, and all things will work together for good to those that love the Lord and are called according to God's purpose. (Romans 8:28). Furthermore, I believe that our God is a God who suffers with us, that God feels our pain as we feel it. Remember God chose to redeem us through pain and suffering of God's only son!

Hebrews 4:15 says that in Jesus, we have a great high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses, because he was one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet was without sin.

These three temptations in the desert were just the first three of a three year ministry of temptations. Notice that the last verse says that the tempter left Jesus for a more opportune time. a more opportune time???? I have hard time imagining a more opportune time than after 40 days of fasting and isolation with only wild animals for company.

Jesus came to redeem us. He came to deliver us from bondage to sin. He came to undo what had been done. To do that, he had to face down every temptation we humans have ever faced and NOT Yield.

Together, with the spirit of God in our hearts and in our souls, we can make ready to do battle with the evil which plagues our lives and thwarts God's good intentions for us in this world. .

The prayer our Lord taught his disciples to pray says, "Lead us not into temptation." I've always wondered why Jesus put that in there. Certainly, in our text this morning it says the Holy Spirit LED Jesus into temptation in the wilderness. `Maybe the reason Jesus put this line in the prayer he taught his disciples to pray is because he's trying to say, "Hey, I was led into temptation and believe me, you don't want to go there." Or maybe the sense of it is that Jesus wants us to continually ask that we not be led into temptation pray so that we will follow Him -because if we follow Him we will be led AWAY FROM temptation.

I want to remind you today that in those times when you are in the wilderness, trying to find your way through, and when temptation comes and offers you the

wrong answer, the wrong choice -- the wrong use of power, the wrong way to popularity, the wrong kind of partnership –or the easy way out-- that you will remember that God has called your name. Remember that Jesus countered each of his temptations with the same resource we have at our disposal—God’s word. To best equip yourself for facing and defeating temptation work on your “it is writtens.” Remember, that because God has called your name He will see you through and help you by calling on Jesus to give you the power to succeed in facing and coming out on the other side of your trials and ... temptations.

Let’s pray, Gracious God, how blessed we are to live and serve as a community of Your people. Gifted with the beauty of creation surrounding us, lead us into significant relationships that nurture and challenge us, as we experience the promise of life, and are grateful.

Lead us, through this season of lent. Fill us with a peace that passes all human understanding, a peace the world cannot give to us, neither can it take away. But Lord, let us never be satisfied with personal peace alone. Lead us into paths of peacemaking and reconciliation. And God, we pray that You might soften the hearts of those world leaders who are far more inclined to wage war than to seek peace. We pray that we can come together as a country and that our leaders can find a way through the maze of challenges ahead..

God, make us mindful of those among us this day who silently hold hurts and brokenness within them. We pray for those experiencing pain in their significant relationships, those who are yearning for new beginnings in life.

We pray, O God, for young people facing untold pressures and challenges. We thank you for our youth and pray for their efforts to be able to resist and flee temptation.

We pray for older persons seeking to come to terms with limitations and losses. Whatever our life situations, O God, lead us in paths of right living, our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ our Lord.

Heavenly Father, you have created us above all creatures with a wonderful consciousness of ourselves and a marvelous potential for spirituality. Help us to seek and find our identities in you and your Word: that, properly centered, our lives may become holy, godly, and worthy to bear the name of the Christ. Lord, there are so many temptations in this world. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.