

The Test of Temptation
A Sermon by Mr. Tom Mason
Sunday, March 6th, 2022

Deuteronomy 26 : 1-11 ; Luke 4 : 1-13

There is a spiritual depth and power in our lives when we respond in our faith, to the trials, troubles, temptations, and tests that life places us. Not one of us would intentionally choose the pathway of greatest difficulty.

Perhaps this pathway to be travelled was chosen through our own decisions and choices, or perhaps this pathway of harder circumstances, was stumbled onto and has been chosen and decided by others, beyond our control?

In the season of Lent, we are invited to embrace an intentional way of life. For the forty days of Lent, we follow the example of Jesus who was *"led by the spirit into the wilderness where for forty days he was tempted by the devil"* (Luke 4: 1-2). The Spirit did not simply abandon Jesus in the wilderness to fend for himself, he was intentionally placed there. The spirit continues to abide with Jesus, enabling Jesus to grow stronger as the season progresses. The trials of temptation are preparing Jesus for what lay ahead.

In (Luke 3:21-4:1-13) - we learn of the Baptism by John of Jesus, the first public act of Christ's ministry. We also learn of the genealogy of Jesus that works backwards all the way to Adam, the first man, the son of God. We see the presence of God descending on Jesus like a dove, and a voice from heaven, that of God, speaks, anointing Jesus as his Kingly divine son, *"You are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased"* (Luke 3:21)

Jesus has been chosen, and anointed by God, but this is not going to be enough. It is right at this point, when Jesus has identified his purpose and Kingly ties, that Satan appears to battle with him. Jesus comes to fulfill for us the Old Testament prophecy, not as the heavenly king, but as the servant King.

(Psalm 2:2) *"The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed."* and (Isa 42:1), *"Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations."*

It will be a difficult pathway, a mission that will test Jesus in the most severe ways, even up to death on the cross as God's only son, in great pain and

anguish, betrayed and forsaken, Jesus remained faithful to His God. Jesus has an intentional discipline to stay the course, to complete God's mission on earth and to be obedient right up to the end to his heavenly father. *"Let thy will be done and not mine"*

Like Jesus, our hearts also will be tested by God, this testing may often lead us to the wilderness places of hunger, loneliness, and despair. It seems for some of us that these are the places and times where we turn to depend on God, A God who graciously provides for all our needs in all life's seasons.

The Old Testament passage from (Deuteronomy 26:1-11) highlights the gracious provision of God. After forty years of wandering through the wilderness, after escaping their Egyptian bondage, the Israelites have now been delivered into their promised land. *"A land of milk and honey."* This is also a season of "plenty" in Israel and the scripture serves to remind the people of their past tests and to be thankful for God's will and gracious provision. Scripture reminds the Israelites that God continues to provide them with sustenance, **food**, *"the first fruits"* (Deut 26:10); that they are **to rule with justice**, to remember *"the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow"* (Deut 26:12); **to serve God faithfully** *"This day the Lord your God commands you do these statutes and rules. You shall be careful to do them with all your heart and all your soul."* (Deut 26:16-17) God it seems worries that his people will stray from him, when things are going well.

The Israelites are to remember the tests and tribulations of their captivity, in the same way we reflect our own faith in Lent.

(Deut 8: 2) *"And you shall remember the whole way that your Lord God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not."*

God tests his people; he wants to know what is in their hearts. The Israelites did not always get it right. They were proud and then humbled, they were obedient and then not, they were formed and shaped by their past experiences. They shift just like us from condemnation to connection, from rituals to righteousness, from the wilderness to wholeness.

It is with this shared human experience of life shaping and preparation from God, that we live. The temptations of Jesus are not as simple as giving up a slice of triple layer chocolate cake for a month. These are temptations to see if Jesus can be distracted from God and from his mission. Temptations that shift us away from God. As we move into the season of Lent, we wait quietly, alone in our own wilderness, reflecting on our lives, on our journey with Christ aware of distractions.

It is important to understand in this scripture. We are ingrafted with Jesus through our baptism, Jesus was baptised in the Jordon by John and was full of The Holy Spirit. Jesus was without sin, but as the servant King he knew he had to become just like us. So that he could be the sacrifice for all humankind to complete his Mission on the cross. Jesus shared baptism with us, and we with him, lent is also the time where we reflect on our own baptism and our own intentions with a dependence on Christ and with our obedience to Gods will. (Luke 3). Will we remain steadfast in Christ and follow Gods will under all circumstance and in all situations in our life?

The three tests of Jesus:

1st Test: To feed the hungry: *"If you are the son of God, command this stone to become bread."* (Luke 4:3).

Jesus is hungry. To turn the stone into bread would alleviate his own personal hunger, it would also show that he could turn the abundant stones of that area into bread, this would prevent hunger for many people. The devil is challenging Jesus to be a new Moses for the people.

Jesus responds through Holy Scripture from (Deut 8:3), the very words of Moses:

"It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone.""

Bread is good. Bread will not be sufficient to define the mission and purpose of Jesus Christ.

Even though Jesus would not comply to the devil's demand, Jesus did feed the hungry (Luke 9:10-17)

2nd Test: To rule the world with Justice: *"And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time." To you I will*

give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I will give it to whom I will. If you then will worship me" (Luke 4: 5-7)

Luke portrays the devil in the role of "ruler of this world." I wish that I could tell you that Satan, Lucifer, The Devil or Beelzebub did not ever exist. We only need to turn on our television or hit a news app on our I- pads, and we can witness the power of the devil and of evil in our world today. It is not new; it is not unique, and it has been ever present and constant for all humanity. (Gen 3).

Jesus will not bow down to the self- evident power of the devil in the world of man. Jesus replies from the scripture of (Deut 6:13):

"You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve." All authority belongs only to God, to serve anything or anyone else first would place God in second place.

Although Jesus refused the devils offer for worldly power, His proclamation of Gods Kingdom of peace and justice in heaven and earth becomes the central focus of his preaching and teaching.

3rd Test: To serve God faithfully: *"And he took Jesus to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone."*

The devil's testing question is from Psalm 91 which promises God's protection to those who are righteous. The temple is the place of the most high and holy in Jerusalem. (The devil can use Holy scripture for his purposes also).

Jesus replies, "It is said, "*You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.*" (Deut 6:16)

Although Jesus will not jump off the roof of the temple to see if angels will catch him, Jesus continues his mission of victory. The Devil departs for a while.

- Jesus depends on the guidance of both the Spirit and Holy Scripture.
- Jesus prays from his heart regularly.
- Jesus witnesses to us an intentional and obedient, a strong and firm dependence on the Will of God, and of Gods faithfulness.