

March 6, 2022

Luke 4:1-13

First Lent/Communion

“Tempted Beyond Reason “

Here we are at the first Sunday of Lent! Some of you know that because last Wednesday was Ash Wednesday – the first day of Lent. And some of you are wondering why on earth we are speaking about that stuff you clean out of the dryer filter at church. The season of Lint? Lint is always worse in the winter due to washing heavier clothes so that wouldn't make much sense on the edge of Spring. That's L-e-n-t. “Lent.” Lent is the time in the church year leading up to Easter when we focus on *our connection with God* and what might be in our lives *getting in the way* of it or what there is in our lives which *might make it stronger*. This is why we have the temptation of Jesus before us as a text today.

To dig into this text, we need to start with the word, “Temptation.” We have tamed this word to mean, “*The inclination to something wonderful which we aren't supposed to have and if we are lucky – we will bypass any prohibition and get the thing we really wanted in the first place.*” When we think about temptation like this – it makes it hard to take it seriously.

Genuine temptation is quite different. Genuine temptation is *dangerous* - which is why Jesus taught us to pray, “*Lead us not into temptation.*” Temptation is also quite tricky. Often, when we are tempted, ***it comes in the most respectable clothing*** – often promising good. Jesus' temptations are all like this.

Jesus public ministry is about to begin, and each temptation seek to undercut the ministry before it begins. While appearing in respectable clothing. The temptation comes when Jesus is genuinely hungry. This is meaningful and we know it from experience. Not because we have fasted for forty days – but because *we have learned by painful experience what a mistake it is to go to the grocery store on an empty stomach!* (I'll have one of those and one of those and...) We don't do our best thinking on an empty stomach. This first temptation seems most reasonable to me. How can it be bad to quench your hunger? The second temptation resonates with our culture in which money is king. It must be a good thing to acquire the goods and capital of this world...and in the third temptation we face the question: ***“Really – if you are the Messiah – shouldn't everyone know it?”*** Scripture is even quoted to justify having everyone flock to you with admiration. I'm speaking your language here Jesus – work with me!

Except Jesus points out: acting as if *all that counts* in life is food is a dangerous path. *Not trusting God* but accumulated wealth is folly. *And forcing God's hand* to do what we want in our own time – is a prescription for disaster.

In Jewish history there were significant moments when the leader of the people had a trial for forty days. Even forty years if you count the children of Israel in the desert. And speaking of the children of Israel – wouldn't turning rocks into stones be a lot like God providing mana in the wilderness? Stealing God's place?

On the other hand, the people in the congregation whose lineage favors the Greeks a bit more than the Hebrews might look at these temptations and say, "I get it – Jesus shows us he is a **righteous** person who **can resist the love of pleasure, wealth, and glory**. These three temptations are fiercely difficult to manage, and Jesus nails all three.

So, when we get down to it – *this experience prepares Jesus for ministry* and sets *the kind of teacher* he will be. Yeah Jesus! But how does this help us? Well, it certainly helps to know Jesus had choices of **how to be God's anointed** and chose the life-giving way of suffering servant when he didn't have to.

Jesus also chooses his weapon of choice against temptation to be a deep and abiding relationship with Scripture. So much so that the final temptation is couched in scripture to make it look more attractive. We are not likely to match Jesus connection with Scripture – but **we do need to nurture one**. Making friends with and understanding the basics of Scripture helps us live well and outfox temptation.

It is also helpful for us also to know **God's wanting the best for us outweighs God wanting us to be comfortable**. Comfort is not always what's best. And in the words of American wisdom literature, "*If it is too good to be true – it probably is.*" Wait – I get to serve God and "wow the crowds?! Great! Too good to be true.

Jesus shows us that battling temptation *is less about reasoning it out than living out of the spiritual lives we already have as God's children*. May the days moving forward from this first Sunday of Lent find us building up our lives with God so that we too can manage it when we are tempted beyond reason.