

Sunday - February 21, 2010
Pastor - Rev. Paula P. Werner
Sermon - **All This Can Be Yours**

Luke 4:1-13 *"May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be formed by your grace, for you are our Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen."*

When I read this I want to say, "no fair, no fair." Why is it when everything seems to be going great, then something awful comes along..... we know that for Jesus he has just had the wondrous experience of baptism by his cousin John in the Jordan River, and our scripture says, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan." That was where God said, "this is my beloved Son..... with him I am well pleased." Don't you wish that Jesus had had some time just to enjoy the baptismal experience and God's affirmation of him, but then we know that life can come at us in hard, awful ways just when we think things are good. So one thought we might take from this passage is that it certainly shows that Jesus is human..... things aren't perfect in his life.... They are good, and then there is awful temptation --- evil enters the picture.

Jesus goes from this high, wondrous baptismal experience out into the wilderness. Scripture says he was tempted for 40 days --- Matthew, Mark, and Luke report on this event in Jesus' life. We know that 40 is a very common number in the Bible --- it means, "enough time to accomplish what was needed". So here is Jesus, fasting in the wilderness; he's praying, he's talking to and listening to God, he's gearing himself up for the job of his life that is ahead. And Jesus did that and we do that by being connected to God --- and that is done through prayer.

The devil comes and tries to attack Jesus' ministry by tempting him to abandon God. He first tries by appealing to Jesus' need for nourishment the devil says: "IF you are the son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread." Well what would have been so awful about Jesus turning the stone into bread? After all, doesn't Jesus do miracles later on making 5 loaves of bread and 2 fishes into enough food to feed 5,000? Doesn't he turn water into wine? So what is the big, awful deal about him being asked to turn this stone into bread? Let's look at how Jesus replies to the devil's temptation – he quotes the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, chapter 8..... "one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." Jesus is reminding the devil, and us, that it is not just the physical satisfaction that must be met --- not just our bodily needs, but our emotional/spiritual. We need the Word of God. Jesus COULD turn the stones into bread but the issue here is the motivation behind the feats of power. Jesus used his power for good, to help others, not to prove he could do tricks. He used his power to glorify God, to do good in God's name, not to get himself out of a tough situation. Jesus knows that we humans need more than a good meal to fix our lives. So the devil has

been thwarted on his first try. The devil tries again. The devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world..... All this...I will give to you, if you will worship me. Isn't it curious that the devil thinks that the world is his to offer to Jesus, but obviously he does -- Satan offers Jesus rule – kingship-- over all --- with the devil truly calling the shots-- if Jesus will “worship” him.

Jesus' reply..... straight from the scriptures – from Deuteronomy --- “worship the Lord your God” The devil is trying to offer Jesus a short-cut to kingship. The gain without the pain. Jesus knows what lies ahead in his ministry and life. He will experience rejection, persecution, loneliness, betrayal, humiliation, then the agony of a horrible crucifixion. *After* all this he will again sit as Lord at the right hand of God, but it must have been an *incredible* temptation to take the short-cut to kingship and NOT to have to go through his life ordeal. Jesus did not give in.

Just like Jesus, we often get those short-cuts – the gain without pain offers. We get offers of getting ahead or gaining something without truly deserving it through our work and efforts. Often we see this in the junk email messages. Have you gotten those ads to get a diploma --- even become an ordained minister..... no tests, classes, books, or interviews. Just \$49.95..... these are worthless pieces of paper.... There is not shortcut to real knowledge and learning. Temptation to short cuts are there all the time.

Jesus' third temptation --- “IF you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here.” Jesus refuses to demand that God save his life by deliberately placing himself in jeopardy. Jesus was a model Jew; the fulfillment of Israel's heritage, the son of God who loved the Lord with all his heart. Jesus' response: “don't put God to the test.” Jesus knows that he needs prove nothing to the devil.

Three big temptations for Jesus. Jesus did not surrender to any of them. How did he do this? He was truly human; how did he turn his back on temptation? I believe the clue to the answer was in our first sentence of our scripture reading. It said, “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit...” Jesus had received the Holy Spirit at the baptism which he had just received from John at the River Jordan. That spirit led him and kept him connected with God. And I also believe that Jesus was able to turn his back on temptation because he had internalized God's word. He knew God's truth – he was a good Jew; he knew the Biblical story..... he responded to the devil' temptations twice with the words, “It is written...” in countering what the devil was trying to get him to believe and do. He knew God's truth and could not be swayed by the devil's arguments and rationalizations.

There's a lesson for you and me. In countering our temptations, we need to be s

pirit filled and shaped and held accountable by God's word.

Temptation is a universal human experience. Had Jesus not been tempted, he would not really have been human. The temptations are a vital part of the story that proves to us his humanity. Jesus was fully human and knew what it meant to be tempted.

What about you and me and this issue of temptation? I believe that most of us fully realize the sins, the traps, the evil, the big temptations that are out there and that we must turn away from. So I'm not going to spend time preaching about not murdering, because that's a highly unlikely temptation for most of us. And you certainly know that although there are incredible material products every way we turn in the world, to get these things illegally through stealing or shoplifting is sin. It is usually not those clear-cut issues that tempt us. It is usually those times and situations where we attempt to cut corners or rationalize and try to justify our cheating on our income taxes, or perhaps taking money under the table while receiving unemployment benefits. Oh yes, we are tempted.

I've also made the decision not to preach against the temptations of pornography this morning, or of not living up to our marriage vows while we are far away on some duty assignment or corporate conference meeting far away from those who know us. Of course these are temptations that face many of us, but I think these are pretty clear-cut in terms of the evil they cause in our lives.

I'd like us to go from here today with a bit broader attitude about temptation. Temptation is all this I've mentioned --- and so many other desires and attractive offers you readily know and acknowledge, but it is also acquiescing – giving in to temptation when we focus on self instead of others and God. Temptation, more broadly considered, is when we focus on ourselves and what we want, our greed, selfishness, self-interest, instead of the interests and needs of the community, of service to others, of love lived out.

So we all get tempted – pretty much all the time. Let me cite a couple examples – true stories of where I've observed temptation not taken and where good ruled. I'll never forget Bonnie --- who came over to me to ask me if I'd help watch her two toddlers so she could drive back a few miles to the local nursery store. She had purchased some shrubs and gotten home and realized that the store's cashier had given her too much change back from her payment. She wanted to return the excess money. I'll never forget watching her drive away, to return money --- which frankly, she could have kept and no one would have been the wiser. That commitment to honesty impressed me; it still does. Whether she was tempted or not to keep the money, I don't know. I do know that she honored God through her actions.

You know, for most of us, it's the little things that tempt us and that subvert our morality. It's the temptation to cut corners, to not do what we should do or are called to do as followers of Christ. Yet, when we resist the temptation to do

less or be less than we are, God is glorified. You, quite a few of YOU, have acted in those good ways – and I heard about your actions this week. Here's how: Debbie and Larry Whittington have been attending church here for several months now. They attended our new member classes but just weren't yet ready to become members --- that's okay. They were enjoying their participation here and you were friendly and welcoming to them. Then, Larry stumbled, fell, went to the doctor to find out why, and the doctor discovered a tumor on his brain stem, which had metastacized from his lung, and then they found cancer in his back. He was hospitalized here at MWH and then transferred to McGuire in Richmond. All this has happened since Christmas. Throughout this hospitalization, you sent cards, and made calls and kept him actively in your prayers. You may have been tempted to just not bother --- after all, you didn't know them well, they hadn't been attending here long, but you did bother.... You did act in loving ways. You put yourself in 2nd place and reached out to someone and put them in first place. You have lots to do in your daily life – you're busy --- you might have been tempted to just put off sending him a card, jotting them a note --- but you didn't. You might have been tempted to say, "I'm too busy" but you didn't. You might have been tempted to ignore Larry and Debbie in their need, but you didn't, and your actions have spoken to them. Larry said to Debbie in the past couple of weeks just before his death, " this church stuff is real; I don't know what to do with all this love."

I do not know the temptations that may be presenting themselves to you this morning. I know that surveys I have seen cite materialism, pride, self-centeredness, laziness, anger, sexual lust, envy, gluttony, and lying as temptations of many. I also know that these same surveyed persons said that temptations were more potent when they had neglected their time with God and when they were physically tired. Resisting temptation was accomplished by prayer, by avoiding compromising situations, through Bible study and through being accountable to someone.

You and I have begun lent --- our preparation time for the glorious resurrection of Jesus. May you find hope in this story from Jesus' own life, may you go from here with a few ideas – tools to help you battle temptation in your life.