

Sermon – 24/10/2010 am

Jesus Tempted

Study Text: Luke 4:1-4

When I was young I had to walk almost one kilometre across the farm to catch the school bus. The walk was quiet and uneventful most days – just a few cows to pass on the way. But one day as I was walking by the tree in the paddock a magpie swooped low over my head. It kept on attacking. I got scared and started to run. I ran all the way back home. My mother gave me an umbrella which I put up to cover my head. I felt safe now as I walked past the tree on my way to school.

Some years ago I was listening to a preacher on the subject of temptation. He used a very interesting illustration. He said ‘you cannot stop the birds flying over your head but you can stop them making a nest in your hair’. You will be tempted to sin, and being tempted is not sin. Sin is yielding to the temptation. While ever you walk on this earth you will be subject to temptation. You cannot get rid of Satan but you can resist him.

Satan is alive and well. He is your adversary, the one who hates God and hates the people of God. He is the ‘diabolis’, the devil, the evil one. Satan roams around seeking whom he may devour (I Peter 5:8). He even tempted Jesus when he went into the desert after his baptism.

Why?

Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan marked the beginning of his public ministry. At his baptism he received confirmation that he was indeed the Son of God. *You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased* (3:22). Jesus was fully human yet here he received confirmation from heaven that he was the unique Son of God. He heard his Father say he was well pleased with him. It was a high point, a mountain peak for Jesus. As Jesus came down from that mountain it was an opportune time for Satan to launch his attack. He would strike at the Son of God right at the beginning of his ministry.

The beginning of a new work, or a new relationship, is a time of change and uncertainty. In today’s language it is a time of heightened stress. It is a time of great expectation and maybe of disappointments. It is a time when we are especially sensitive to the word and actions of people around us. It is a time when we are especially vulnerable to attacks from Satan. If you are walking in obedience to the Lord and serving him, Satan will have you in his sights.

Jesus was embarking on the greatest work God ever called a man to do. He was beginning the great work of redeeming mankind from sin and death. He was beginning the undoing of the work that Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden, the work that led to the fall of the human race.

In Eden Satan was successful in getting the first Adam, the created son of God, to listen to him and do what he suggested. Now he would approach the second Adam, the only begotten Son of God, expecting to have success once again. What would success to Satan here in the desert have meant? Do you find such a thought horrifying?

The experience of Job enlightens us to the motives and methods of Satan, the same adversary who was attacking Jesus in the desert. Satan is a fallen angel, an angel who rebelled against God who created him. Having been cast out, he roams the earth attacking God’s people and trying to frustrate God’s good and perfect purposes.

Satan roams the earth seeking to build up his own kingdom, the kingdom lies and all evil. His lust for power knows no bounds. He seeks to destroy all that is good and pleasing to God. Job felt Satan's attacks most sharply. He would have felt the full force of his evil, namely death, if God had not said 'no' to Satan (Job 2:6).

The question 'why?' takes us to the words that Jesus *was led by the Spirit into the wilderness/desert* (4:1). It was God's will to take him into the desert to be tested. God was pleased with Job saying *there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man* (Job 1:8). He was pleased with Jesus, telling him so directly from heaven. Being filled with the Holy Spirit meant Jesus was well prepared for the devil's attacks but not protected from them. Being filled with the Holy Spirit did not mean his flesh was not vulnerable to weakness and to attack.

Was this temptation of Jesus real? Could the Son of God really be tempted to do evil? Jesus was born without sin and as the Son of God could not sin. But that does not mean he could not be tempted. We read in the Bible that he was *tempted in every way as we are yet without sin* (Hebrews 4:15). At his baptism Jesus was identifying with us in order to be our representative and take the penalty for our sin. In becoming a man he became vulnerable to temptation.

Not only was he vulnerable but he shared about his temptations with his disciples. Have you thought how Luke and the others knew about the temptations of Christ? Since Jesus was alone, he must have told them about being tempted by the devil. Jesus was always ready to identify with his disciples and encourage them as his disciples. Jesus wanted them to learn, and he wants us to learn, how to resist the devil.

When and How?

In those days he ate nothing ... and he was hungry (4:2). Sigmund Freud reduced human behaviour to a matter of drives. Human beings are driven, among other things, by hunger and thirst. Hungry people will do anything to get food; they will steal or even kill. Jesus was hungry after forty days of starvation. Where could he get food to satisfy his hunger? Satan might have tempted you to steal but with Jesus he had another temptation. Satan knows our weakness and he targets that weakness. For Jesus it was his supernatural power as the Son of God.

The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God' (4:3). We are not told in what form the devil appeared or even if he took any form, although it seems he was present in some form. He appeared to Eve in the form of a serpent or snake. He later appeared to Jesus through his disciple Peter (Matthew 16:23). Satan can also appear as angel of light (II Corinthians 11:14). We must be alert to his disguises, as well as his voice.

How did Jesus know the voice was that of Satan even if he did not recognize him by form? The voice he heard would have reminded him of the voice that Eve heard in the garden. It was a voice that cast doubt over the goodness of God and the truth of God's word. Did God really say you shall not eat of every tree of the garden (Genesis 3:3)?

If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread (4:3). Jesus had not long before heard a voice from heaven telling him he was the Son of God. Now he heard a voice casting doubt on this truth. Jesus heard a voice suggesting he prove to himself that he was indeed the Son of God.

The next temptation also cast doubt upon the authenticity of his divine Sonship, his position as the second person of the Trinity. Resisting the devil at this time would put Jesus in good stead for another attack when he was on the cross. As Jesus hung on the cross, not just hungry and thirsty but

in agony and dying, he heard voices saying *If you are the King of the Jews save yourself and he saved others, let him save himself if he is the Christ* (Luke 23:35, 36).

Some people want personal proof that God is true to his word. They are not satisfied with what they read in the Bible. They want God to do a miracle before they will believe. 'If you do this or that then I will believe' they say to God. The Jews demanded a sign from Jesus but he said the only sign that would be given was the sign of Jonah (Luke 11:29). Christians can be tempted to doubt and to seek a sign from God. Thomas demanded proof that Jesus had risen. He was ashamed when Jesus rebuked him.

Beware that little word 'if'. It is a short but sharp arrow in Satan's arsenal. He can use it in negative, as well as positive ways. He can use it to drag you down; making you feel God is picking on you. 'If God truly loves me why do bad things keep happening and why is my life such a mess. My friend has a good job and a great family and they don't go to church. Why do I bother?' Or in a 'positive' way, we hear Satan's voice say 'if only I had a new wife/husband I would be happier'. If only I got away from here and started again' or 'if only I won the lottery!'

Doubt was combined with need in this first temptation. Satan did not tell Jesus to make the stone into a beautiful coat. He was hungry, not cold. The Son of God need not suffer from hunger; he could use his supernatural power to obtain food! What would be wrong with making some bread to eat?

Jesus had a need but there were legitimate and illegitimate ways to satisfy that need. We all have needs but there are legitimate and illegitimate ways to satisfy our needs. We are told to come to God with our needs and he will satisfy them (I Peter 5:7 – notice this verse is in the context of the devil tempting us).

Jesus Resists

Jesus could have turned a stone into bread, but was this what the Father wanted him to do? He had been led by the Spirit of God into the desert to be tested, not to find food. Jesus knew God's will, and it was not for him to use his divine power to satisfy his own needs, and certainly not at the suggestion of the devil. He would later perform miracles to confirm divine truth, and people's faith in God. The devil had no faith to confirm.

What did his Father have to say on this matter? You will find an answer to every temptation in God's word because *no temptation has seized you except what is common to man* (I Corinthians 10:13). Jesus answered the devil with words of Scripture – *It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone'* (4:4). He knew these words written in Deuteronomy 8.

These words are found in the context of God testing his people in the desert with hunger. *He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna* (Deuteronomy 8:3). Jesus trusted in the providence of God. Jesus was not controlled by so called drives of the body, and neither are we. He was driven by the word and the will of God. Are you so driven?

Jesus trusted himself into the mighty hand of God rather than use illegitimate means satisfy his needs. And God never fails. Matthew tells us that when the devil left Jesus *behold angels came and ministered to him* (Matthew 4:11). God cares for you and he will provide for you. Do not fall prey to the devil who will entice you to satisfy your desires in ways contrary to what God has declared in his word.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon