

“Lead Us Not Into Temptation”
Luke 4:1-13
Sunday, February 14, 2016
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

Opening.

Remember Calvin and Hobbes? One of my favorite comic strips ever.

In the first Calvin and Hobbes strip,

“Calvin’s dad is working on the car, when Calvin walks up in a safari hat and says, ‘So long, Pop! I’m off to check my tiger trap! I rigged a tuna fish sandwich yesterday, so I’m sure to have a tiger by now!’ His dad replies, ‘They like tuna fish, huh?’ As Calvin walks off, he says, ‘Tigers will do anything for a tuna fish sandwich!’ The final frame shows Hobbes, hanging by his foot from a tree, munching on a tuna fish sandwich. He says to no one in particular, ‘We’re kind of stupid that way.’”

It has been said that, “Every day we are tempted to be less than we can be. Without giving it much thought, we choose what’s easiest. We seldom consider how much more is possible. We take tuna fish when we could do better. We’re kind of stupid that way.” (Brett Younger).

The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all say that Jesus was tempted. And he was tempted by much more than a tuna fish sandwich!

It may be hard for us to take this very seriously. We may not think Jesus was really tempted, not the way we are tempted. He is divine, after all.

But he is human, too. Fully human, fully divine.

The temptations of Jesus were real temptations. Jesus was tempted. The New Testament clearly states this. Luke tells us plainly that Jesus was in the wilderness tempted by the devil... that the Spirit led him into the wilderness for the purpose of being tempted (vv. 1-2).

Matthew tells us that Jesus was tempted. Mark tells us that Jesus was tempted. John does not take time to mention it. He was in too big a hurry to get Jesus back up to Galilee.

However, the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is "...one who in every respect has been tempted as we are" (Hebrews 4:15).

The three temptations – listed in Luke and in Matthew – cover the basic temptations of human life: materialism, power and security. These three attempts at seduction are extraordinarily powerful and ensnaring.

I. Materialism.

When Satan tells Jesus to change stones into bread, he is using the temptation of materialism. Will God really provide for your needs?

Note that Jesus is not hungry due to poverty; he is hungry by choice. He is fasting in order to draw closer to God. The issue is willpower and a sense of purpose. The devil is pushing "if-it-feels-good-do-it."

Willpower and a sense of purpose can easily get confused in our complicated lives. And doesn't the Evil One just love to make it more complicated? Hear this story about confused priorities:

"One night a well-known and highly respected preacher was working on his sermon for the following Sunday. His little son came in and asked his daddy to come tuck him in. The father told him to get into bed and he would come in a few minutes to give him a goodnight kiss and tuck him in. But then, he became engrossed in his preparation, and much later, he

remembered the promise. He went into his son's bedroom only to discover that the little fellow was already asleep. That story is heart-breaking because it has a familiar ring to it. His passion to be a good preacher – a good thing – had tempted him that night to be a bad father. Do you see what happened? The tempter even turns our strengths against us if we are not careful.” (James McCormick).

II. Power.

When the Evil One offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, he is offering power. What will God really give you if you bow down to him? The Evil One urges Jesus to bow down before evil instead.

Jesus' retort has nothing to do with the power Satan offers him. The only issue for Jesus is this: who should we worship? There is no question for Jesus. The only one worthy of worship is the Lord your God; “serve only him,” says Jesus (v. 8).

Hear this story about the temptation of power:

“[The man] had finally got his chance to make the Really Big Sale. He was going into the final interview on the biggest contract he had ever written. As he was ushered into the office of the executive buyer, an assistant brought her coffee and left. The atmosphere was cordial, and he knew he was giving his best presentation ever.

“Then the assistant tapped on the door, re-entered the office and spoke briefly with the executive. She stood and said, ‘I apologize, but I have to tend to a matter. I’ll just be a minute or two.’ And she followed her assistant out of the room.

“The sales representative looked around the beautifully appointed office. He saw her family pictures on her desk. Then he noticed a contract on her desk. She had evidently been

studying a bid from a competitor. Leaning forward, he could see the column of figures, but it was obscured by a diet soda can.

“He was tempted to move the can and see the bottom line of his competitor’s bid. What harm possibly could there be in reading her private information? After all, she had left it out in plain sight, almost. After wrestling with himself a while, he finally decided to take a peek.

“As he lifted the soda can, he discovered that the can wasn’t filled with soda at all. Instead it was a bottomless can filled with 1,000 BBs which gushed out, and ran all over the desk and cascaded onto the carpet. His attempt to short cut the competition was exposed.

“Not every temptation is so obvious. Not every failure is so embarrassing. But every temptation is a challenge. Not even Jesus was spared the choosing.” (Mickey Anders)

III. Security.

Finally, when the devil tempts Jesus to jump off the top of the temple, he is tempting Jesus with the need for security. Will God really protect you? Are you secure in the love of God?

Here Jesus asserts his willingness to accept the finality of death, even death on a cross. Only in this way does Jesus ultimately overcome the power of death and create the reality of the resurrection. Hear this story about tempting fate:

“A teen-age boy told his parents he was going to run away from home. ‘Listen,’ he said, ‘I’m leaving home. There is nothing you can do to stop me. I want excitement, adventure, beautiful women, money, and fun. I’ll never find it here, so I’m leaving. Just don’t try to stop me!’ As he headed for the door, his father leaped up and ran toward him. ‘Dad,’ the boy said firmly, ‘you heard what I said. Don’t try to stop me. I’m going!’ ‘Who’s trying to stop you?’ answered the father, ‘I’m going with you!’” (Barbara Brokhoff).

There is a certain thrill and excitement, and a sense of freedom, in leaping off the top of a temple. The devil promises Jesus he will not be hurt; God will protect him. The devil whispers the same promises in our ears – that we can live however we like, neglecting ourselves and those we love. God will fix it all for us.

Jesus says, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test” (v. 12).

We might want to think about listening to Jesus before we go jumping off any metaphorical – or actual! – cliffs.

A mother was teaching her 3-year-old daughter the Lord’s Prayer. At bedtime, she repeated after her mother the lines from the prayer. Finally, she decided to go solo. Mom listened with pride as she carefully enunciated each word, right up to the end of the prayer: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us some E-mail. Amen.”

“Lead us not into temptation” -- we pray this prayer every time we say the Lord’s Prayer, whether here together in worship, or in our weekday lives. God does not free us from temptation. As Jesus was tempted, so we are tempted – by our desire for material wealth, power, and security.

Closing.

Here’s another story for you:

“A group of mountain hikers came across an old woodsman with an axe on his shoulder. ‘Where are you going?’ they asked him.

“ ‘I’m headed up the mountain to get some wood to repair my cabin,’ replied the woodsman.

“ ‘But why are you going up the mountain?’ they asked incredulously. ‘There are plenty of trees all around us here.’

“ ‘I know,’ he said, ‘but I need strong timber and it grows only on the highest elevations, where the trees are tested and toughened by the weather around them. The higher up you go, the stronger the timber grows.’

“And that is what God desires for us – that through the winds of trial and the storms of temptation we would grow strong and live on a higher level – strong to resist the devil’s urging, strong to serve God, and strong as we stand together in faith and service to one another.” (Lee Griess).

Perhaps our best prayer is this: Lord, lead us not into temptation, unless you are there with us as guide and protector, to give us the strength and the power of the Holy Spirit to resist evil.

May you always have God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, to guide and protect you against the Tempter’s subtle invitations.

Amen.