

TEMPTATION
Luke 4:1-13
Preached by Dr. Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
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A woman lived in a neighborhood going downhill fast. Houses were abandoned, yards were growing wild and the streets were filthy and unsafe. Property values were tanking. Being someone not afraid of a challenge she decided to take action and organized a fund raising drive. She phoned people, sent letters and even got the support of a private foundation. She raised over \$500,000.00 and used the money to buy herself a new house in a better neighborhood.

Unlike this resourceful lady who conned her way into a better neighborhood, Jesus didn't give into the temptation to help himself at the expense of others. We'll take a closer look at the implications of the three temptations of Christ momentarily, but first, let's identify how we're tempted.

Let's begin with this, we're primarily tempted to be self-serving, by making ourselves seem more important than we're afraid we're not.

It's not by accident that the biblical concept of temptation is introduced very early in the story of Adam and Eve. Curiously most if not all we know about them is found in this story. Adam and Eve, not content with life in Paradise, were tempted to grab for more and get themselves out from under God's authority.

Not surprisingly, their rebellion had unintended consequences: they lost their innocence (they knew that they were naked) and they blamed everyone but themselves. ("It was her fault!" "It was his fault!" "The serpent tricked me!") The serpent's winning argument was when they ate the forbidden fruit they'd know the difference between good and evil and be on an equal par with God. Just the opposite happened, they lost their innocence and now needed God more than ever.

Now contrast the outcomes of the story of Adam and Eve giving in with Jesus' decision to resist. Don't believe for a second his obedience was guaranteed because Satan's deceptions would be automatically rejected since the Son of God couldn't sin. Remember Jesus was as human as the rest of us, so this story becomes anemic and insipid if we see Jesus not being as vulnerable as you and me but also capable of going either way.

Ever wonder why Jesus was better than the rest of us when it came to resisting temptations? Certainly his love for his Father in heaven had a lot to do with it. Jesus didn't want to let him down. But equally important was Jesus' love for humanity. Jesus knew if he caved, even once, he'd no longer be innocent and therefore disqualify himself

to die for the sins of the world. It was that responsibility that empowered Jesus to resist if only because of his commitment to God and man to sacrifice himself for our salvation.

Let's now review the specific temptations Jesus faced. First,

“Turn these stones into bread” next, “Jump down from the pinnacle of the temple,” and last but not least, “All of this will be yours if you bow down and worship me.”

Satan knew he couldn't tempt Jesus not to be the Messiah but maybe he could keep Jesus from being the Messiah he was supposed to be by tempting Jesus into taking a different course by becoming a more user-friendly Messiah.

Likewise, Satan also knows when to pull back from a bold frontal assault and instead be cunning and subtle when tempting you and me. Yes, there're situations when we're vulnerable and Satan blatantly throws the kitchen sink at us. But most of the time Satan uses tactics that include clandestine incursions into our attitudes and behaviors, with the hope of convincing us that our selfish and self-serving desires are legitimate, normal and healthy. He puts the suggestion in our heads that there's nothing wrong with putting yourself first because if you don't look out for yourself no one else will.

“...Turn the stones into bread.” Satan was zeroing in on one of our basic fears: not having enough to make us feel secure. Satan was trying to get Jesus to doubt God's provision and take matters into his own hands to provide for himself as well as everybody else who'd follow him. After all successful leaders always promise everything. So give the people bread and whatever else they want and you'll have them eating out of your hand.

Jesus could've successfully waged a prosperity gospel campaign, like some of the televangelists, instead Jesus stood firm, resolved to be the servant who modeled sacrificed and service, always trusting God would always provide.

Jesus ended this temptation not to trust God when he declared, “It is written, one cannot live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Next Satan tempted Jesus with absolute power. Showing in an instant all the great nations and empires of the world Jesus was promised, “It's all yours for the taking. You only have to sell me your soul and it's yours.”

Satan's proposal was a pretty attractive alternative to being crucified, basically proposing “Why waste yourself by dying on a cross when absolute power can be used for good, making a brave new world, unified and peaceful, under your authority?”

By dangling the possibilities of grabbing power instead of giving it away, God's plan for the salvation of the world was put in jeopardy. It had to be hard for Jesus to

resist taking the easy way out, and instead choose suffering and death on the cross. Thankfully Jesus turned Satan down. “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him!”

Finally Satan took Jesus to the very top of the Temple. Below were the crowded courtyards filled with priests, Pharisees, scribes and pilgrims.

“Go ahead Jesus jump! God won’t let you die. He loves you too much. Why should you jump? Well isn’t it obvious? All those people down there have been waiting for the Messiah, waiting for you! Make a grand entrance! Jump knowing God’s angels will come in the nick of time and give you a soft landing. The crowds will be amazed and the Romans will be afraid. No one would dare question your authority. You’ll be an instant celebrity, Jesus Christ Superstar. Everyone will want to be your new best friend.”

This time Jesus rejected the temptation to be the center of attention and sucking up all the oxygen in the room for himself declaring, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

In vain, Satan manipulated and schemed to tempt Jesus away from his primary objective and knowing he was defeated retreated, waiting to tempt again another day.

The only way we could ever know about Jesus’ temptations was because Jesus told the disciples to let them know he knows what it’s like to stand toe to toe with the Evil One. Jesus wanted them to be on guard, Satan is crafty and powerful, and knows how to push our buttons to break us.

Get used to it, temptation is something we have to live with, but with help it can be overcome.

A little girl in Sunday school was asked what she does when tempted to do something wrong. She answered, “When the Devil knocks at my door I send Jesus to answer and the Devil says, ‘Oops, wrong house!’”

That’s a darn good answer. By yourself resistance is impossible, but with help from above resistance is possible.

If you’re ashamed and frustrated with yourself because you keep giving into the same temptations and you want to get out of the rut you’ve got yourself into and start growing again, Lent is a wonderful opportunity to start practicing resistance.

Here’s a suggestion for a spiritual exercise for Lent. Make the decision to ask God to help you give up whatever it is separating you from God and your neighbor and then make time every day praying about it. Turn off the car radio, go into a room by yourself and shut the door, get yourself a Lenten devotional booklet, even go on line and find web sites that facilitate heartfelt conversations with God. Open your heart to Jesus, ask the Holy Spirit for guidance, listen for Father’s plan and hopes for your life. Talk to God, but equally important listen for God’s voice in the silence.

The three temptations Jesus resisted are the exact same ones Satan uses to break us. We all have security, control and ego issues. We all want more than enough stuff, we find it hard to let “go and let God” and we all have the desire to be noticed and applauded. All this and more makes us easy targets especially when our needs are not being met.

By sharing his experiences with temptation, Jesus shows us the better way but also exposes Satan’s tactics so next time when he pounces, we’re ready for him.

So when temptation comes knocking at your door ask Jesus to answer for you. Don’t give into temptation. Give into Jesus. Let Jesus tempt you into becoming free from the things you shouldn’t do and free for the quality of life God planned for you.