

Sermon: It's when we let our guard down      Psalm 91      Luke 4:1-13

In our Gospel reading this morning, Luke is reminding us that Satan; in all his forms; is trying to turn us away from our faith in God and our following the Lord Jesus Christ. And part of our Lenten journey is to seriously reflect and grapple with this ourselves, as we journey with Jesus to the cross of Good Friday.

This morning, we find Satan taunting, tempting, and testing Jesus during His forty days in the wilderness. The evil one is desperately trying to stop Jesus from doing the work that our heavenly Father sent Him to do. And what is so helpful about this reading for us is that we get to learn directly from Jesus how to deal with the temptations that confront us. The temptations will be very different for each of us, of course. We are not the Son of God. But still, we can learn from Jesus how to overcome whatever temptations we might face.

Take the first temptation that Jesus faces, for example. It's about food. We've all had temptations involving food, right? And never mind going without food for forty hours; imagine going without food for forty days, as Jesus did. Being that hungry, Satan was expecting to find Jesus at His weakest; the moment Jesus let His guard down. Satan taunted Jesus by saying, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread". That must have been quite tempting for Jesus, but was it really? Is this really about food or is there more to this story? This is a temptation for Jesus to use His divine power for Himself. And this is the key to the story. Satan knows that if he can get Jesus to focus on His own wishes, desires, and needs, then the devil has won. The cross of Good Friday cannot happen if Jesus succumbs to thinking solely about Himself and His own wellbeing.

So, when we are tempted in this way; when the devil finds us with our guard down; how do we handle it? Jesus turns to Scripture. He quotes the Book of Deuteronomy: "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone', but by every word that comes from the mouth of God". We don't live *by* bread alone, and we don't live *for* bread alone. Our lives are about the relationship with God that Jesus came to restore; to reconcile. Our Lord is reminding us that when we put our relationship with God first, then everything that follows makes more sense because we know what a sacrifice the cross of Good Friday represents.

The second temptation is one of control; the control that comes with a price. Jesus was being tempted to acquiesce to the devil so that Jesus could be given

control over the world; control that the devil does not have to give. We know that Jesus is in charge, and His reign is not founded on force, but founded through a God who loved us first. The proof is in Jesus Himself; the One who came to serve.

Now, it is not part of God's plan that we take control of the world, but sometimes we are tempted to take control of our little piece of the world. And instead of trusting our little piece to God, we assume control and it never satisfies us because it is not part of God's overall plan. We are left wanting. This is the price. Instead of seeing the whole picture as God does, we have the blinders on and only see what we want to see. When our guard is down, we too fall prey to assuming control from God and Jesus, rather than trusting, worshiping, and serving with love, and then leaving the rest to God and His Holy Spirit.

The third temptation that Luke shares with us today is about faith in God. Satan took Jesus to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, and tried using Scripture to sway Jesus from His path. The devil again taunts Jesus. "Throw yourself down from there, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone'". Imagine how much easier it would have been for Jesus to teach and preach, to gather disciples, and begin building His church, if He began His ministry with a dramatic miracle like this. Everyone; from the Pharisees to the fishermen; would have known immediately, that Jesus is the Son of God. But what Jesus is teaching us today is that sometimes it is better to do something in the right way, and fail, than to do something in the wrong way, and succeed.

Success is not the be-all end-all. Mother Teresa famously said, "God has not called me to be successful, but to be faithful". We are called to be faithful, and to trust the results to God. Jesus didn't start His ministry with a dramatic miracle. This would have been a shortcut, and it might have worked, but Jesus chose being faithful over being successful. And Jesus invites us to do the same.

Jesus faced three very real temptations before He began His public ministry. Satan knew what he was attempting; catch Jesus with His guard down. And the same is true for us still today. We will always be tempted to focus exclusively on ourselves, to attempt to control our little piece of the world, and to emphasize success over faithfulness. It is through prayer and Scripture, and with the help of

God's Holy Spirit, that we can live for others. Jesus teaches us to trust God in all things.

Any time we struggle; anytime we feel our guard is down; Luke's story teaches us that Jesus overcame the devil; both for us as individuals, and the world as a whole. In the wilderness, on the cross, and everywhere in between, Jesus resisted the devil's temptations. Jesus didn't listen to Peter, who tried to relieve Jesus of His suffering in Jerusalem. Jesus didn't call upon the army of angels, who were eager to fight for Him, even when the Son of God was betrayed and arrested. And even as our Lord hung dying on a cross, Jesus refused to save Himself for His own sake. It would have been as simple as turning a stone into a loaf of bread, but He chose death to sin instead, to do his Father's will for you and for me.

Jesus didn't turn the stone into bread, and he didn't come down from the cross. And because he didn't, he defeated the devil, once and for all, which means that no matter what is happening in our lives, no matter the temptations and trials and tests we might be going through, even when our guard is down, we can turn to Jesus, and see Him there with us, to lead us and guide us all along the Way.

Jesus was called by the Spirit in baptism, tempted by the devil in the wilderness, and remained faithful to His mission and ministry. Without the call and temptation, Jesus's human journey would have been incomplete. Jesus had to wrestle with the same fear and insecurity that we all wrestle with when our guard is down, and His steadfast trust in God will always be our inspiration.

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is about our human relationship with God. It is also about our human relationship with the truth that we are not alone to face the troubles, fears, heartbreaks, and temptations of the world on our own. We are not alone now, nor will we ever be. Choosing to trust God is not always easy, and that choice is never made in a single moment. But making that choice every day will create a good habit of faith and will give us the strength we need to travel through the wilderness periods in our own lives.

Today is the first Sunday in Lent, the first Sunday in a journey toward the cross. Our journey in this sacred season does not end at the cross. Our journey begins as we go forth from the empty tomb. But before we get to the empty tomb, we have the opportunity to pay attention to what God is doing in our lives and in our world right now.

Lent can be a challenging season, and when we are open to the Spirit's movement in the world, when we are open to listening for God's still small voice, we might be surprised to see when and where God shows up. As we begin this Lenten journey together, we are challenged to live into the unknown, to bask in the mysterious presence of God, and to pay attention to the leading of God's Holy Spirit. Only God can know what this Lenten journey will bring for each of us, but God makes each and all of us a promise; a promise to sit with us, to walk with us, and to carry us when life seems too hard. God promises that He will never leave us or forsake us. God's love, God's presence, and God's faith in us is real. Our journey is just beginning, and our journey continues.

To God be the glory. Now and forever. Amen.