The First Sunday of Lent – 9 March 2025

Message – Jesus tempted as we are tempted

Creator, Redeemer, Giver of New Life, may we find you in both the wilderness and daily life alike. **Amen.**

This is third time I am preaching on the first Sunday of Lent sermon here. To my surprise, I haven't spoken about Jesus's temptations in the wilderness. Now that I have read five commentaries on Luke's version, I think that may have been an act of avoidance. There is not even any vague scholarly consensus on why we have these three temptations, what they mean and how we apply this passage to our own lives.

While there is often debate there is rarely such a wide range of interpretations without some degree of consensus emerging or one at least being able to see the underlying assumptions that drive the different interpretations. It is quite tempting to take the Markan approach and not to mention the specific temptations at all.

In the somewhat distant past, I am moderately sure that I have explored the ways in which Jesus's temptations were very different from our own. This time around I am going to explore how the temptations are similar to our own.

Scholars cannot agree on whether the forty days represents the forty days of Moses on the mountain and a hint of Elijah heading into the wilderness, or the forty years of Israel in the wilderness. What they can agree on is that all of Jesus's scripture quotes are from chapters six and eight of Deuteronomy when the people of Israel were in the wilderness.

The forty years in the wilderness are spoken of as both God testing Israel and Israel testing God. The wilderness is an all round testing place. God passes with flying colours, Israel not so much, but God is faith and keeps the covenant made with Abraham.

It is possible to see in the three passages that Jesus uses to in defend himself from temptation, to see that Jesus is not giving in to the temptations that the people of Israel had given into. We might view it as a retelling of an old story. A story told as a cautionary tale of the way we should not be is now being retold with the example of how we should be.

The first of the quotes, *"One does not live by bread alone",* is a reminder to be mindful of what we hold at the heart of our lives. Our lives are about far more than our physical needs, particularly the distorted needs of a consumerist society. In God's design for fullness of life, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbour as yourself." (Luke 10:27)*

We are multi-dimensional beings. To think of ourselves as only physical, only measured by what we eat, or what we own, is an inadequate view of life. We are whole beings and one cannot separate heart, spirit, strength, and mind. The commandment and Jesus are conveying that it is every part of our being that we must engage in the endeavour living life in all its fullness.

The Word of God, lived out in the life of Jesus Christ, is the vital starting point. That word is also present in the Hebrew Scriptures but we were slow to hear it. We needed it lived

out for us in the life of Christ, who fulfilled the old covenant and created a new covenant which we celebrate today in the Eucharist.

In the Eucharist we find a visible sign of our unity as the body of Christ, the ongoing incarnation of the Word of God. That is our calling and our aspiration. To be the living word of God and in so being to nourish others. God created us as fundamentally communal beings, which only works if we have love, with a bit of non-judgement thrown in, for one another.

The second of Jesus's quotes, *"Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him"*, is in response to the offer of power. Jesus had great power, the question he, perhaps, found himself asking was how that power should be wielded.

As we explored last week, the how of living out our values is every bit as important as the values themselves. Jesus knew that it is not possible to create a kingdom of justice and mercy, without living out that justice and peace. Ording others to live out such values is not consistent with the values. The only way is to live them and allow others to choose to follow those values.

If we are fortunate enough to have power, we need to consider how we use that power. Are we servant leaders as Christ was? Regardless of how high or low our status is, we are called to walk humbly with God. True humility is about using our gifts and talents to the best of our abilities. For some that may mean that they are called to a leadership role because that is their gift.

Many of us at the moment may feel that the world is

somewhat out of control and that we have no power. It is true that some things are beyond us. But in our daily lives we all have the power to live out love and grace towards others and to care for others with our own particular gifts.

The strange thing about humans is that caring for others nourishes our own lives and gives us more life. Life is not a zero sum game. By caring for one another and for those around us we all benefit more than if we only look to meet our own need, or more often greed.

Our image of power is the Servant King who washed his disciples' feet. I am among you he said, as one who serves.

Jesus's third quotation, *"Do not put the Lord your God to the test"* is about our being prepared to follow what seems like a counter intuitive way. The way of giving up our own lives.

Luke has put this as the third quote with a move to Jerusalem, point us to think of the end of Christ journey and the choice Christ faced in the garden of Gethsemane, *"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done." (22:42)*

If we know what God's will is, we should follow it, even if it is not what we want. For of a wide variety of reasons, we may be quietly avoiding offering our time, talents, and treasures to God and in service of others. We all have parts of our lives that we hold back.

The challenge is that sometimes people give too much of themselves. This is not the example of Christ. We are after all thinking about this in the context of Jesus' spending forty days away from other people, led by the Holy Spirit, to be the three persons of God in the wilderness.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus looks for the support of his closest disciples. The Word of God incarnate, looked for the support of his friends. God does not called us to go through life alone. God does not call us to be self-sufficient and independent of others. God calls us into relationship and to interdependence. That means having the grace to let others be our servant as well as being their servant.

The devil also quotes scripture to Jesus: to *"God will command angels concerning you, to protect you"*. The Devil is taking it out of context. The psalm is about those who take refuge in God, which means accepting the help that God offers. When we decline the help and support that God offers us, we are testing God, we are pushing God to give us the strength or help us in way where we don't have to humbly acknowledge that we need the help of others. We all need the help of others.

While the temptations of Jesus may be different in magnitude, they are not different in nature from the temptations that we all face. Perhaps in these temptations we see the foundations of the sermon on the plain.

To live lives of love and non-judgement, grace, we must constantly feed on the Word of God and allow the Word to examine every part of our lives; we must place God at the centre of our lives; and we must have the humility not to test God but rather to humbly accept God's way, even if it means washing others feet and leads to the cross because that is never the end of the story. We celebrate the Eucharist today, reminding ourselves of the fullness of God's love for us and our hope. Amen. Amen