

## **“Temptations snippets”**

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**Deuteronomy 26:1-11 Luke 4:1-13**

The temptations of Jesus appear every year for us on the first Sunday of Lent. Many of us here today, those of us who've been church attenders most of our lives, have probably heard 20 or 30 sermons on the temptations of Jesus. So what to do? Here's your 31<sup>st</sup>!

I've decided today simply to offer a few random snippets about the temptations, in the hope that one snippet might provide you with something fresh or different, and hopefully something helpful, that we can learn from the temptations of Jesus. Just five snippets, four on different unconnected themes and a fifth which comprises two overall themes..

### **Snippet number 1**

Jesus has just been baptised. At his baptism extraordinary things happened – he has witnessed the heavens opening, the Holy Spirit descending on him and he's heard God's voice telling him he is God's son, beloved by God. Phew.... that certainly must have confirmed for him that he indeed had a challenging mission to fulfil. But just what is his mission from God, and how should he go about it?

So off to the wilderness he goes, for 40 days, praying, fasting, to be with God, to sort out in his own mind and heart what he needs to do, to plan. And as he plans he's tempted to do the wrong thing, to use his God-given abilities to look after himself instead of others, to seek his own glory, to provide a spectacular show in order to create belief. But he steadily and faithfully rejects each temptation. God's way is to bring people into genuine relationship with God through their experience of God's love and forgiveness, and to empower people for loving self-giving service, it's not about miraculous demonstrations or political power or selfish enrichment.

Several lessons in this of course, but the one which struck me this week is the importance of careful planning whenever a big project beckons. Thinking through what the job actually is and how you are to go about it, and seeking God's help through prayer and pondering, are the right starting points whenever we face a significant challenge.

### **Snippet number 2**

On Thursday evening this week I joined over 100 Canberra Christians to listen to the Rev Brian Howe, former deputy prime minister who served in the governments headed by Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. The starting point for his stimulating address was the global financial crisis and ethics. One of the themes he returned to several times during the evening was the inherent selfishness and acquisitiveness built into our modern western economies, that prosperity has come to depend on ongoing economic growth regardless of the damage that may be doing to our environment and to the future of humanity.

That reminded me very much of the huge truth expressed in Jesus' response to his first temptation – “one does not live by bread alone”. We need our daily bread, but material things, material enrichment is not the secret to a happy life. Our culture has sadly moved more and more to measure success chiefly in material terms, in the size of our salary or bank balance, the value of our house or the prestige of our car. But personal happiness, positive relationships with others, a sense of purpose and fulfilment, a clear conscience, and a life filled with love, require much more than material progress. We need spiritual depth and understanding. We need God. One does not live by bread alone.

### **Snippet number 3**

The temptations show us a very human Jesus. We're told he ate nothing for 40 days and was famished. No wonder he was tempted to turn stones into bread. Fasting for 40 days is a huge undertaking, it's more than most hunger strikers in their prisons or detention centres can manage. Yet Jesus makes this sacrifice, in order to tune into God, to work out his mission and how to go about it.

Jesus' life was full of sacrifice, constantly giving of himself for others, rarely if ever looking to his own needs first. Our Old Testament reading today reminds us that the Hebrew people were to sacrifice some of the firstfruits of their crops, to give them to God as thanks for the fruitfulness of the land.

That causes me to wonder about the place of self-sacrifice in our own faith and discipleship. Do we ever give up something for God? Do we ever turn away from some temptation because we've recognised it's not the way of Christ? What, if anything, are we sacrificing during Lent, in order to sharpen our spiritual connection with God and with God's calling on our lives?

#### **Snippet number 4**

Lots of us have wondered why in the Lord's Prayer we've changed the sentence "Lead us not into temptation" to "Save us from the time of trial". That change was made 20-30 years ago after scores of Biblical scholars had discussed for years the very tricky translation problem posed by the unusual Greek of that sentence in our gospels. "Lead us not into temptation" sounds like a prayer for us to avoid the extra chocolate or the second glass of wine – which doesn't really sound like one of Jesus' most important concerns. The scholars worked out that Jesus was actually leading us to pray that we won't have to face the ultimate challenge to our faith of persecution, of being called to deny our faith on penalty of martyrdom, of being dragged before persecutors trying to force us to deny God and deny living the way of Christ. Some translations read "do not bring us to the test" or "do not bring us to hard testing" which is saying the same as "save us from the time of trial".

#### **Snippet number 5 – how to conclude these disconnected thoughts?**

Just two closing thoughts really:

- The value of occasionally retreating from the world, to pray, to ponder, to be with God, to plan.
- The value of a spiritual discipline, of regular prayer, and possibly of periodic sacrifice, giving something up in order to bring home to us that material things are not the most important part of life, in order to provide us with space to connect and reconnect with God.

The temptations of Jesus – examples which are rich resources for our spiritual understanding and growth. Ponder them, at least once every year on the first Sunday of Lent.

To the glory of God, Amen.