

Lent 1 – Wesley Services – 14<sup>th</sup> February 2016

Theme: “We are all tempted”

Reading: “Luke 4:1-13 – The temptations of Jesus”

Text: “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.”  
Luke 4:1

Introduction

There is a spiritual depth and power for life and ministry that is made possible as we respond in faith to trials, trouble, temptation and testing. If given a choice, most of us will not intentionally choose a path filled with difficulty. Our prior choices may cause us to stumble onto this path. Similarly, the choices of others around us may create harsh and hostile circumstances that force us onto this path, but most of us are slow deliberately to choose the path of discipline.

Yet in this season of Lent we are invited to embrace this intentional way of life. For the forty days of Lent (which does not include the Sundays), we follow the example of Jesus who was “led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.” The Spirit does not just ‘drop him off’ in the desert to fend for himself; the Spirit continues to abide or be with Jesus, enabling him to grow stronger through this season of time where he is tempted. The ‘forty days’ while taken literally as the season of Lent can be interpreted as a ‘long time’ in a Biblical sense.

For ourselves it is good to see that Jesus had his challenges, as we do ourselves. Possibly our temptations are somewhat different to Jesus’ but we are tempted as he was.

Let us look at the passage from Luke 4:1-13

We have three temptations that are written for us in the Gospel.

I suspect that these are ‘catch-all’ temptations representing areas where Jesus is tempted and will continue to be tempted.

The three temptations given are:

1. “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”

Vs 3 Here Jesus had the temptation to meet his own immediate needs. It seems harmless enough. However Jesus recognises the inherent danger in this request, a selfish, self-centred action which isn’t seeking to serve God and rejects the temptation.

2. “The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, “I will give you all authority and splendour, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will be all yours.” Vss 3-4 Here Jesus is offered power, position and prestige simply by forgoing his ministry based on the love of God for the world and following and worshipping the devil. Literally the one who is the opposite to God. This is the temptation of dictators and those seeking power to have control over others. Jesus’ response is simple: ‘It is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only’.

3. The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here.’ ‘For it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” Vss 9-10

In this last temptation the devil even uses Scripture to test Jesus. Here we have self-preservation being offered no matter what Jesus does – he will be safe. What an offer!

However is this what God wants in this scenario? Jesus retorts with Scripture saying: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'

This was not the end of the temptations for we read: "The devil left him until an opportune time." Vs 13b

In many ways we are not dissimilar to Jesus – we are tempted as he was:

1. Ours is a very self-centred society which constantly is expressing subtly to us to put ourselves first, don't worry about others, seek to pursue your own pleasures and desires. Jesus reminds us that we cannot live by bread alone – there is the spiritual, the Godly, the compassion for others to which we are called.
2. Secondly there is a huge emphasis on personal power and glory within our society. We see this with the rich lists, the celebrities of various sorts, some politicians and the socialites. People striving for worldly glory instead of remembering to worship their Lord and God.
3. Also ours is a society obsessed with health and wellbeing (which in itself is not a bad thing) but just may be we have lost the focus, that sometimes there will be testing times even as we follow our God. We are not impervious to suffering, disease and tragedy simply because we are Christians. Rather we are called to come through these times praising God for whatever the outcomes, strengthened by the journey.

### Conclusion

Let me share with you a reading simply called "A Reflection on our Lenten Discipline" by Liz Crumlish.

Chocolate or wine? Wine or chocolate? Which should I renounce?

Or should I really push the boat out and renounce both.

I mean it is only for six weeks this Lent – even I could manage that.

And I'd emerge smug and self-righteous, my halo extra shiny after being so self-denying.

I mean that is going to make a difference, isn't it?

That will really change the world if I indulge my lack of self-indulgence.

Besides, I'd probably lose 7 kilos too and that won't do me any harm – a new figure and a shiny soul, not to be sneezed at!!

Is that what it's come to? Is that what it's all about?

Giving up and then self-congratulating.

That's what God surely wants. No, it is what God demands – that we make ourselves miserable and short-tempered and renounce all our coping mechanisms for six weeks so that we can emerge again from our self-imposed tombs all the better for our "suffering"! God help us when we trivialise sacrifice. When we dare to imagine that a little self-denial helps us identify with love in its extremity.

God, the last word in party excuses, who came up with every reason ever invented to party, must shrivel and die when confronted with our pathetic attempts at Lent.

Repentance occasions rejoicing – so why do we fail so miserably to capture this life-giving season? Why do we make a drudgery of something beautiful – getting ready to celebrate such love and being transformed by such life.

Chocolate? Wine?

How about throwing our all into love!

Lent is not about 'giving up' anything. It is about our intentionality in living out our faith. It is about knowing we will be tempted but not giving in but being strengthened through prayer, worship, fellowship and knowing God's gracious word of repentance for each of us. Ours is a God of love who has given us Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit to empower us. May we enter Lent with hope, joy and love to celebrate our God given faith. Amen