

## “Temptation”

Luke 4:1-13

First Sunday of Lent, 02/25/07

[the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor](#)  
[Zion West Walworth United Methodist](#)

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.’ Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “One does not live by bread alone.” ’

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, ‘To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’ Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.” ’

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you”, and “On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.” ’ Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” ’ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Prayer.

We so much long to blame someone else.

“The devil made me do it.”

We desperately attempt to justify our actions using every means possible.

“I am only human.” or “I couldn't help myself.”

We pathetically plead our innocence as if we were some random victim of fate.

“To err is human; to forgive is divine.”

Oh, please -

who are we attempting to fool?

It isn't as if God doesn't know

how to plumb the depths of our hearts

and know the fullness of our motives.

Truth be told,

we want to be tempted.

We love playing with fire

just to see if we will get burnt.

We love having our self-esteem boosted by a successful brush with death

(how else can one explain bungee jumping?).

We love having a choice

- of saying “yes” or “no” -

because choice is intoxicating;

it gives the false premise

that we are in control of our universe.

So, we, like Jesus, go willingly,

and allow ourselves to be led

into the wilderness,

away from prying eyes,

to play with a little fire.

“Temptation”

Luke 4:1-13

First Sunday of Lent

[the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor](#) © 2007

[Zion West Walworth United Methodist](#)

Had any of Pickett's men known the outcome,  
not one would have left the tree line  
and charged uphill through open fields  
to assault the Union's impregnable lines.

We assure ourselves with our wit and wisdom  
that our training, our superior intellect, or our  
weapons  
will protect us.  
By exercising our power of choice  
we will be able to pull back from the point of  
no return  
and outsmart the devil's hand.  
If all else fails,  
we are prepared to default to denial:  
"whereas others have failed,  
I will successfully dodge temptation's bullet"  
we tell ourselves.  
"It can't happen to me"  
are our final words  
as we add our fallen corpse to the battlefield  
of sin.

If our Gospel is to teach us anything this  
morning,  
it is that temptation is far more real,  
and far more dangerous  
than any one of us are prepared to admit.  
We aren't just burned by a safety match.  
Temptation incinerates the human condition  
with napalm.

Not one of us  
stand a chance  
facing temptation  
alone.

The fact Jesus did  
is a tribute to his dual affiliation:  
being both human  
and divine.  
Jesus' first challenge to start his ministry

is nearly his last.  
Jesus prevails over temptation  
because he is lord of all-  
He is lord over his hunger  
and, therefore, needs nothing from the devil.

You and me?  
We're hungry all the time.  
When we see an advertisement for free  
bread,  
it's like a sign on a college campus that reads  
"free beer"  
and we grab like a thief,  
gorge ourselves  
and storing the excess into bigger barns  
"just for a rainy day."  
Trust in God for our daily bread?  
"Oh, yea, I forgot."

All these kingdoms  
- the devil sweeps his hands  
completely encompassing a 360 degree arc.  
All these kingdoms can be yours,  
the devil falsely promises that which he can't  
deliver.  
Power, authority, control.  
Who in their right mind wouldn't take  
advantage  
when opportunity cold-calls  
and knocks on your front door?  
Being creator and lord of all,  
Jesus sees the hyperbola  
of being offered something that he already  
commands.

But you and me?  
We can't do it alone.  
We're offered the world  
by the best snake-oil salesman  
history has ever know.  
Our imaginations feed our dreams  
and our dreams feed our imagination.  
If only I had a little more, I'd be all set.

The world would be perfect,  
perfectly under my control.  
If I only had a little more land,  
a little more money,  
a little more authority and power,  
I'd be able to make my own destiny.  
Jesus doesn't take the bait,  
but you and I do,  
ten out of ten times its offered to us.  
"I love the smell of napalm in the morning,"  
the devil incarnate proclaims  
in the movie "Apocalypse Now"  
as he strides confidently  
across the incinerated battlefield  
that moments earlier  
had been a South Vietnamese village  
and school.  
That is exactly what each of us can become  
if we play with the fire of temptation  
if we don't flee the wrath that is to come  
and seek the safety  
- the only true safety -  
of Jesus and his Word.

But, Oh, how we love to play with fire.  
Come on, let's see a little magic!  
Call on your angels,  
the devil confidently commands,  
and let them save you.

The observant immediately  
catches the failed logic  
of commanding others  
to rescue the Savior!  
Jesus doesn't need any angels.  
He doesn't need to prove himself.  
He is already the chosen one  
the Savior of the world.

The observant also  
recognizes the devil's evil strategy:  
it isn't above the devil to quote scripture,  
to use it for his own evil means.

Holy cow, that guy is smart,  
we think  
if it isn't already too late.

What dooms us and destines us for failure  
is that in our human-ists  
we succumb to emotion.  
Like a bone-headed judge  
in a Florida courtroom (this past week),  
we don't have the strength or fortitude  
to resist the power that temptation holds over  
us.  
We don't have the ability to  
keep from becoming swept up  
in the emotion of the moment.  
We think we can contain the fire,  
but the reality of the human condition  
is the fact that the burn unit at Strong  
(Memorial Hospital)  
is filled with people just like us.

Finally, I believe that it is important  
to observe in our text today,  
that temptation is never dead.  
Never.  
Like a post-nuclear holocaust cockroach,  
Temptation can't be killed, crushed, or  
completely exterminated.  
We have a choice:  
partner with Jesus,  
repent and live, or,  
give up, give in, toss in the towel  
and allow temptation to be converted into sin,  
to annihilate everything and everyone in its  
path.

I've thrown around some pretty powerful  
metaphors  
in this reflection,  
but not one of them have been reckless.  
The truth of the matter is  
that temptation may be our biggest, single  
most challenging

barrier to living and growing ever closer to  
God,  
our heavenly Father.  
This is not a small thing.  
This is a big thing;  
that brings down the powerful,  
ruins families and careers,  
and can lead,  
Jesus insinuates elsewhere,  
to being shut out;  
banished to the outer darkness,  
where there is crying and gnashing of teeth.

Dearly beloved,  
join with Christ this season of Lent.  
Pray hard.  
Pray sincerely,  
“lead us not into temptation.”  
And pray completely,  
that when faced with temptation,  
that, by partnering with Christ,  
that we may stand firm,  
that we may not yield,  
now,  
or ever.  
Amen.