

The Devil is Still Busy!

Luke 4:1-13

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Dr. Patricia L. Hunter

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.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O God, our strength, and our redeemer. Amen.

First let me say, Happy Valentines Day. Today we are grateful for the gift of love. We are grateful for those who love us because of who we are, and those who love us in spite of who we are. And, we are grateful for the greatest love of all—the love God has for us. God is always ready to give us a second chance and look beyond our faults and meet us at our place of need. Seldom does Valentines Day fall during Lent. This must be a tough day for those who gave up candy for Lent.

This is the first Sunday in Lent and Lent is my favorite liturgical season of the year. I don't have to buy any gifts. I don't have to go into debt. I don't have to arrange for any special meals. I don't have to get a new outfit and the liturgical color purple is one of my favorites.

I didn't grow up observing Lent, but as an adult I fully embraced the season. I like Lent because Lent is totally about me and my relationship with God and you and your relationship with God. At SFBC our Lenten theme is, ***Practicing Our Faith***. It is a time for us to reflect on God's purpose for our lives and whether God continues to be first in all aspects of our lives. During Lent you can establish a spiritual discipline or revitalizing one you have neglected.

You may choose to fast or give up something—desserts, wine, shopping, being in control. I had a pastor friend who told me once she was giving up struggle for Lent. Or you may choose to add something—daily exercise, prayer time, journaling, drinking 8 glasses of water to remind yourself that our God is living water.

During Lent you can look at the relationships God has blessed you with. There may be ways you can better honor those relationships. You may choose to have a weekly date night, or weekly prayer time, or commit to saying, *I love you* daily to your beloved.

I encourage you to use this season, this 6 ½ weeks, to get closer to God. Practice your faith in new ways. Get a prayer partner and pray for one another daily. Call those who are shut in or homebound. Volunteer for ministries you normally wouldn't choose. You will be changed and you will truly be ready to celebrate Easter when the big day arrives.

Our text for today is set at the end of a big season for Jesus. After Jesus was baptized, he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. For 40 days, (just like out time of Lent is 40+ days) Jesus prayed, and fasted. Before Jesus began his public ministry, he went away to get spiritually ready for the task that lay before him.

Now, that is a sermon in itself—getting spiritually prepared to do the work God calls us to do. Instead of racing head first into a major project, or jumping to make a major decision, it would be to our advantage to spend significant time seeking God's wisdom, God's power, and God's grace.

Seeking God's wisdom take intention and time. We can't hurry God. Our culture does not encourage us to keep still, meditate, pray or be silent. We are in the midst of noise all the time. Some call it noise pollution. We see people wearing headsets and earphones all the time. Some of us even sleep with the television going. Amen.

But if we are going to be successful and practice our faith, we have to put first things first. That means spending time getting mind, body and spirit on one accord—because temptation and challenge are just around the corner.

Now after Jesus had refrained from food for 40 days, he was super hungry. Some of us can't make it four hours without food—Jesus went 40 days. He was ready to feast on collard greens, cornbread, black eye peas, fried catfish, mac and cheese, peach cobbler, and sweet tea. Somebody knows what I'm talking about.

When we are at our weakest point, the devil shows up to tempting us to turn away from doing the right thing. Just in case you don't know, the devil is real. Scriptures says we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers. The devil is not a cute fella in a red suite, with horns and a tail. We could resist that. But the devil is a presence or spirit that tempts us or challenges us to put everything and anything before God. It is that power, that energy, and at times that person-- that tempts us to put things before people, greed before compassion, ego before common sense, and fear before justice.

The Devil said, "Jesus I see you are a bit famished. So why don't you take this stone and turn it into bread." After having spent so much time with God, Jesus was ready for the test. Jesus was not going to allow his physical need to distract him from following God's plan for his life. Jesus said, "It is written that one will not live by bread alone. Notice that Jesus knew the scriptures. He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3. When we are tempted and struggling with powers of deception, evil, and injustice, we need to know what God has to say. Jesus said, it is written..."

Progressive Christians have at times been content to let conservative and evangelical Christians tell them what is in The Book. We need to know what is in the scriptures for ourselves and interpret God's word according to God's revelation to us. That is one of our Baptist liberties. During Lent we will be highlighting our Baptist liberties in a weekly blog on the church website. This week Jim Segaar has an excellent blog on religious freedom and responsibility.

So the first test of turning a stone into bread and appealing to Jesus' physical desire didn't work, but the devil is persistent. Next the devil took Jesus to an area where he could see all the countries of the world. The devil said, I will give all this to you and it is mine to give, if you will just worship me. Now I need you to know this morning that, ***the devil lies too***. Those countries didn't belong to the devil to give away. He had no authority to make that kind of offer.

While the devil claimed authority he didn't have, Jesus knew exactly where his authority came. Jesus was rooted in the One who created the heaven and the earth. Jesus received his authority from the great "I AM" who created manna for God's chosen people in the wilderness. Jesus had all power in his hands and didn't need any power the devil thought he had.

Jesus quoted Deut. 6:13, "Worship the Lord your God and serve only God." We are at times tempted to worship our jobs and that next promotion, or our investment portfolios, our children and their accomplishments, or we worship the ways we have always done things. Yet, Jesus reminds us there is but one God that we must worship—not things, people, not even our own egos.

But again the devil was persistent. Most of us have more than one weakness. So the devil will come to us in many forms offering different trinkets—sex, a new job, greater self esteem, designer drugs, tons of friends, money, influence, and power. So this time the devil took Jesus to a pinnacle of the temple and according to my sanctified imagination the devil said, look Jesus, before you start this journey of being a sacrificial lamb you need to know whether God has your back. Jesus, I'm sure you don't want to get too far down this road just to find out that God won't live up to God's promises.

So throw yourself off this pinnacle and watch the angels come to your rescue. For it is written, said the devil 'God will command the 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. Now on this final temptation, the devil quotes scripture too. Psalm 91:11 to be exact.

My sisters and brothers, those who do not follow the way of Jesus—know Christian scriptures and are happy to tell us what they mean and use them out of context to hurt us. So I am serious when I say know what is in your bible. We may have significant issues with certain parts. That is OK. God won't get ticked off about that. We can engage in a hermeneutic of suspicion, meaning we can approach cautiously. We can test the scriptures by the scriptures and by God's revelation in the 21st century. But we need to know what we believe and why.

The devil wanted Jesus to question God's faithfulness. We too are tested and question whether God will be there for us in the trenches. But Jesus said, "It is written, do not put the Lord your God to the test." Deuteronomy 6:16. When the devil had finished every test, he departed from Jesus ***until an opportune time***. The devil is never gone for long. We will be victorious when we call on Jesus and

step out on faith, but challenge and testing will come again. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was again tempted. He was tempted to turn his back on the purpose of his coming. Yet, Jesus rose to that challenge too.

And, because Jesus was victorious at the beginning of his ministry and even in death unto the resurrection, we too have victory. There is an old gospel song that says, ***Don't wait till the battle's over shout now. You know in the end, you're gonna win.*** So know that whatever challenge comes your way, whatever battle against the devil confronts you, whatever test awaits you, the power of God is just a prayer away. Victory is already yours in Christ Jesus.