

March 6, 2022 - Lent 1 - Luke 4:1-15

Hard Start

Rev'd Lynda Johnson
(preached at Peregrian)

Today we're in this extraordinary season of Lent and starting a new series as we walk with Luke through Lent.

I'm not sure how many of you are familiar with the opportunities of Lent, but there are so many. We've just finished our series on the Values we've identified in V26 and one of those is being Christ-centred. by the way, do you remember the others?????

As we walk through Lent and come to Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter Day surely there is no greater time to focus on Christ and all that he has done for us. To be Christ-centred.

Isn't it true that the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ is **the** identifying mark of Christianity.

Christianity simply would not **be**, if Jesus had not died and risen.

So as we walk with Luke through Lent, I want to encourage you with some of the more traditional thinking about Lent and its opportunities.

Which is about it being a time of particular and focussed discipline. Particular and focussed because it needs a goal to work towards..

So I encourage you to set yourself a spiritual goal. Not for spiritual brownie points, but a goal, maybe even just a small step, towards **you** becoming more like Jesus.

Is that what you would like to be? More like Jesus. And if you've never thought about it in that way, why wouldn't you want to be more like Jesus? So if you're motivated to be like that, set yourself a goal, a small step towards becoming more like Jesus.

And that's why it's helpful to use one or more spiritual disciplines - like fasting, like carving out more time for prayer and bible reading, like practising a time of silence, or choosing someone else to be especially accountable to with your growth goal over these weeks to Easter.

It's about taking an opportunity to be intentional.

I'm sure we all want to grow as Christians.

And I'm sure we'd say that all the time.

But it's common for life to get hectic, and take over good intentions, and we either do our bible reading and prayer in a hurry, and say 'good, we've done it'. Or we forget altogether, and before you know it a few days have slipped by and your Bible hasn't been opened. Is that ever a lived experience for you? It is for me.

Being disciplined is hard isn't it? But surely being a disciple, must involve disci—pline mustn't it?

The word disciple is all wrapped up in the word discipline.

And the reason I say that we can take this season of Lent to be intentional, is based on our reading today from Lk 4.

Surprisingly, it's the Holy Spirit who takes Jesus into the wilderness for the specific purpose of testing. He's just been baptised by John when that incredible voice came from heaven saying "You are my son, whom I love. with you I am well pleased.

What an extraordinary experience. My thinking is that if you were there, it may not have been just Jesus filled with the Holy Spirit, but everyone. Who wouldn't be after hearing God's voice audibly like that. No wonder Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit when his heavenly Father said he was well pleased.

But Jesus being full of the Holy Spirit, is then led by that spirit to go into a real downer. The Holy Spirit took him, purposefully, from a spiritual high to a spiritual low. And left him there for 40 days, and for 40 days he was met by the devil, tempted by the devil, taunted by the devil.

..... who used that wilderness experience, that weakening experience to really bring Jesus down. Like putting a knife into an already open and gaping wound.

How did Satan do that?

We have three temptations recorded here for us.

One to turn stones into bread so that hunger could be satisfied.

One to be powerful and influential

and one to test the safety quotient and get some notoriety.

Now of course Jesus was hungry. The text tells us he hadn't eaten for a long time. It would be a natural thing for him to create some bread. We know he has capability. Obviously Satan knows that capability too. So he tempts Jesus to use that capability. I'm sure Jesus wouldn't have been surprised by Satan's suggestion. Oh yeah, I could make bread! Why didn't I think of that. Thanks Lucifer. Great idea. No, I think Jesus was very well aware of his capacity, but he also knew that the Spirit had led him to the wilderness for a time of preparation for three years of ministry.

Discipline - Jesus had already been exercising that, to NOT make himself some food. He cuts right to the very core of what Satan is saying - he quotes Deuteronomy 8. You don't live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. That's how Jesus survived this wilderness experience. In communion with God. Discipline and commitment. Focussed for this time.

Feeding hunger is one of the most basic human needs. And Satan worked with that very basic thing.

Secondly Satan focussed on the temptation for power and influence. Yet another human desire. We all have a yearning to be significant don't we? We don't want to mean nothing to anybody.

Satan said, I can make you powerful if you turn to me.

But again, Jesus quoted scripture, Worship the Lord your God and serve him only. Deuteronomy 6.

Interestingly, he could withstand the second temptation because of the first. The answer to the first temptation led to the second.

The basic need for hunger. The basic need for significance.

And the third temptation was for self-preservation. for Safety. Our natural instinct is for self-preservation isn't it. We gasp for air. If we're underwater we need to come to the surface. Fight or flight - both aspects of safety.

Here Satan cunningly takes Jesus to his God who **can** keep him safe. And says, God can do this. You'll be ok. Jump off. The circumstances show that your risk appetite can be high, Jesus. But Jesus says, I don't need to. And I'm not going to. And anyway the Scripture says, don't put God to the test.

This was indeed a hard start for Jesus' ministry. He had a great beginning, but this was a hard start.

I believe Satan hasn't changed his tactics. He still uses the basic human needs, he still uses significance, and he still uses safety to bring us down.

Our world is currently seeing a great work of Satan in our midst. I can't help but think of Putin as I read these temptations of Jesus in the wilderness. What I believe we're seeing in the actions of the past week and a bit, is a man who has no resistance to these temptations, and in fact already considers himself a great man of power.

We're seeing a man doing anything so that his needs are fulfilled.

And I compare him to Jesus.

And I know who I want.

Be encouraged by Jesus and his use of Scripture. Because when we face times of testing, temptation, or even take some time to focus more than we might otherwise, like being disciplined through the season of Lent, we will be vulnerable for Satan to come.

Do you remember that great biblical figure Job?

What a time of testing he went through.

Let me read you one of Job's answers when a friend tried to give counsel.

Job 23:8-12

But if I go to the east, he is not there;

if I go to the west, I do not find him.

When he is at work in the north, I do not see him;

when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him.

But he knows the way that I take;

when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

My feet have closely followed his steps;

I have kept to his way without turning aside.

I have not departed from the commands of his lips;

I have treasured the words of his mouth

more than my daily bread.

Is Job not a forerunner of Jesus?

Job suffered terribly by Satan afflicting him, and he's acknowledging its reality, and the pain of God seeming far away. And yet, he knows that it is really God at work within him.

Jesus, the suffering servant is also walking into the way of suffering.

We can be confident that when we face suffering, temptations or trials of any kind, we have a Saviour who knows what's it like.

So any kind of discipline we pursue during Lent - what will we do when it starts to get tiresome, or just plain difficult?

And when the fears of floods or wars overcome us, where will we turn.

The Spirit filled Jesus and led Jesus into this time.

He quoted scripture to maintain his stance.

And at the end of this particular ordeal, the Spirit was there again. Look at v.14 - Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.

He went to the synagogue and stood up and said, The Spirit of the Lord is on me.

All praise to the God who is at work. May he be at work in you. Amen.