**Sermon March 26th 2017 – temptation of Jesus**

Today we’re back to the story of Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness where he faced and resisted temptation.

Last week we looked at the concept of wilderness times in our life – how Jesus trusted God, was empowered by the Holy Spirit… but was then driven by this same Spirit out into the wilderness for a season of solitude and struggle. And then, how throughout his later ministry, Jesus continued to seek out mini-wilderness times, short breaks where he could get away and spend time alone in desolate places.

Could we do the same?

Today though I want to look at ***the temptations themselves***.

And… if you were paying attention last week and today, you may have noticed that when we read this story from the Gospel of Luke, we skipped a bit***.***

We started at chapter 3:21-22, but we then skipped verses 23-38, and we carried on from the beginning of chapter 4.

*Anyone know why that is?*

Yeah, it’s because it’s one of those dreaded genealogies of which the Bible has many, and during which pakeha Bible readers especially, tend to fall asleep in. Maori culture gives a high place to genealogies, but pakeha culture doesn’t hugely.

I’ll read a bit of it for you…

23 Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, 24 the son of Matthat,

the son of Levi, the son of Melki, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph…

And down to verses 36 to the end…

36 the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, 37 the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Kenan, 38 the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

Now Christianity is a bit weird in that it teaches that Jesus was God in human form – that in Jesus, God took on flesh and became one of us, like us, completely human. But, our faith *also* teaches that in some miraculous and mystical way, that although Jesus was fully human, he also stayed fully God. That in Jesus human nature and divine nature dwelt together in harmony and in completeness.

It’s one of those things that is hard to get your head around, and it kind of requires a leap of faith that God can do anything, and that’s just what God did.

Normally we don’t have to think about this too hard, but in today’s story, the story of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, it kind of is shoved right in our faces.

Because, things are put in the Bible in the order they are in for a reason. *And normally where would one put a genealogy?* Normally a genealogy goes first doesn’t it? Like in Matthew.

Here though Luke has stuck it part way through his book, right in the middle of this story about Jesus’ baptism and temptation.

And usually the Bible starts with the most ancient ancestor, and then works its way down to the person being talked about. The Gospel of Matthew does that, but not Luke! Luke chooses to start with Jesus, *and* *ends with who?*

He ends with Adam, the son of God.

Luke puts the genealogy of Jesus’ human ancestors right before the story of Jesus’ temptation, and he orders it so that it ends with Jesus being listed as a son of Adam. That means that Luke introduces the story of Jesus being tempted *by really emphasising Jesus’ human nature*. It’s like he’s saying, “you guys are all human, you all get tempted… well, so did Jesus. Listen up to this story and see how Jesus, the son of Adam, the most fully human person who has ever lived, faced and overcame his temptations – ***there is a lesson for you here***…”

So… are we ready to see how Jesus, son of Adam, faced his temptation, and to discover what this lesson might be?

Good! But first…

Another thing that our faith teaches is that ***we were made for God***, we were made to be in relationship with God. In common language it is said that there is a hole in our heart that only God can fill.

Psalm 23 speaks of this with the opening verse – “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Or, in the translation we used with the kids today “The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need.”

God is my shepherd, I live openly in relationship with God, so therefore, fundamentally in life, I have everything that I need. I may be going through a valley of death right now, but God is with me and I am ok.

Therefore, the temptation we’re talking about today at its most basic, is a call away from a relationship with God. It’s a call not to trust God, not to live openly before God, and to instead try and fill that hole in our heart with other things.

It has been said that every back shed and garage is full of toys and stuff… Toys and stuff that people thought would satisfy them, would fill that spiritual void. And that is the kind of temptation I’m talking about and that I believe Jesus faced – a misdirected yearning for completion; a yearning that tempts us to step away from God, and to expect *people and things* to fill what only God can fill.

Now… We will all have different ideas on how we understand what the devil is; but the Bible does often give evil and temptation a personality and a voice, and call it Satan, the accuser, the ancient serpent.

And in today’s story this voice called Satan appears and seeks to bump Jesus off-track before he begins his public ministry, by provoking a sense of emptiness and lack in him - in the hope of tempting Jesus to act out of fear and desire, rather than obedience and trust in God.

***Satan tries to provoke Jesus to feel a lack***, and to then seek *to fill that lack himself;* to fill itwith things other than God, andoutside of a relationship of love and trust in God. These temptations seek to contradict Psalm 23, “the Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need.”

**Temptation 1.**

“Jesus! You haven’t eaten for 40 days, you are hungry and tired and weak… You are unfulfilled! If… If you are the Son of God… *fill this need yourself*!

You don’t have to wait for God, you don’t have to trust the natural rhythms of creation. Force creation to bend to your will! Do it yourself, for yourself! Turn this stone into a loaf of bread. After all, surely God wants you to be happy and fulfilled? Surely God wouldn’t mind?”

This is the temptation to ***aggression***, to just go out and take what we want because we can. However, life’s not just about us. Aggressively taking what we want because we can violates nature, violates our neighbours, and is a step away from trusting God.

Jesus doesn’t argue with these temptations though (because arguing with temptation inevitably leads to into convincing ourselves that actually it is ok to do it – if we give temptation space in our life, we will usually just end up giving in).

No, Jesus doesn’t argue, he just quotes the Bible – boring bits of the Bible! The book of Deuteronomy: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

Jesus reminds us of the fleeting things of this earth, and of our utter need for God. Food is important, but our standing before God is more important. Fulfilment won’t come from our tummy.

**Temptation 2** is again trying to provoke in Jesus a sense of lack – this time a lack of glory and affirmation. Not glory and affirmation from Above which he had already received at his baptism; but rather the more trivial glory and affirmation of people.

This is the temptation to centre his life on ***pleasing and appeasing*** the masses around him whom he can see, rather than centring his life on pleasing God whom he cannot see. “Worship me Jesus, and I will give you authority over all the kingdoms of the earth… Imagine all the good you could do! Imagine how much better you could make this world! Imagine how they would love you! Surely if you do this for the greater good God wouldn’t mind…”

No! Jesus answers this temptation again by quoting Deuteronomy – “Worship the Lord your God and serve only Him.” *God’s way is best not mine*! I am here to serve God, not my ego nor my desire to be loved.

Then, **temptation 3**.

We’re back to “If… if you are the Son of God” again. This time “Jump off the highest point of the temple because, if you truly are who you say you are, then God will rescue you from harm. Do this to *prove* to the people that you are the Messiah! Start your ministry with a bang, with some drama and some adoring crowds.”

Within this temptation is the desire for ***certainty***.

We’d like to be certain about things some times eh? But, too much certainty is the enemy of faith. If we were certain about everything we wouldn’t need faith! Faith requires a bit of darkness, a bit of unknowing, and a whole lot of trust in God.

Certainty leads to people trying to *defend* God in their own strength, and trying *to move God’s agenda forward* in their own strength… often violently (we saw this happen again this week in London).

I’m pretty sure that we don’t need to be reminded of the damage this kind of certainty is doing to our world, regardless of the religion, the political ideology, or the economic philosophy that lies behind it. And so Jesus quotes Deuteronomy at his temptation a third and last time – “Do not put the Lord your God to the test!”

Trust God, and trust God in ***humility***. God might want to affirm that trust with a miraculous encounter at some point, that’s up to God. Have faith, and don’t try to force God to act.

So, there in the wilderness Jesus faced three temptations; each tempting him to feel like he had a **lack** in his life, that the Lord was not his shepherd and that he did not have everything that he needed – tempting him to go out and seek to fill that lack apart from God.

However, Jesus knew that humanities greatest need is for God, as his greatest need was for God his Father.

For we were made for God, to be in relationship with God. There *is* a hole in our hearts, and only God can fill it. Not shoes, or sex, or toys, or power, or fun, or having everyone love us.

These things can be fine and have their time and place, but if we give into the temptation to believe that they will complete us as only God can complete us, then we will be constantly disappointed and constantly on to the next thing and the next thing…etc, etc… and we will end up far from home, far from the true source of Light and Life.

So, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy in the face of his temptations, but as we reflect on the things that try to tempt *us* away from living openly before God, let’s read Psalm 23 together one more time…

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need.

2 He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams.

3 He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honour to his name.

4 Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

5 You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honour me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings.

6 Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life,

and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.

Amen….

*Silence…*

And as we embark on the quest to trust God and to not give into the voices that tempt us away, trying to tell us that we can make ourselves complete without Him…

May the peace of Christ be with you

**And also with you**

Take a moment to offer your bothers and sister the peace of Christ… and as we do we’ll take up our tithes and offerings (and can my helpers please come to the table)

*Offering…*

*Receive from behind the table… brief prayer*

Song:

Our communion song this morning is The Lord’s Prayer

*Helpers come up…*

The Lord is here  
**God’s Spirit is with us**

Lift up your hearts  
**We lift them to the Lord**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God  
**It is right to offer thanks and praise**

Indeed, it is right to offer you thanks and praise…

And so, faced with such love and such grace, we approach this table with humility, confessing before you our own sin, repenting of the times when we listen to those voices of temptation that tell us we lack, that we can be fulfilled and made whole by possessions or relationships, by things other than your Spirit within us.

And so we pray together these words…

**Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world**

**Have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world**

**Have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world**

**Grant us your peace.**

*Distribution… CD*

The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

The cup of blessing for which we give thanks is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

**We who are many are one body, for we all share the one bread.**

**We are all the children of God.**