

“The Saving Word”

Luke 3:21-22 & 4:1-13, Psalm 1, Romans 10:8b-13

Pastor James York

February 17, 2013

Luke 3:21-22 & 4:1-2a “One day when the crowds were being baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. As Jesus was praying, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove. And a voice from heaven said, “You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you. Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. Jesus was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where he was tempted by the devil for forty days.”

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. Our scripture has numerous levels of meaning throughout. There is the literal physical wilderness, the hot dry desert, sparse of life and comforts. There is the metaphoric wilderness representing troubling, difficult, and unsure times. The wilderness of peer pressure, vulnerability, and fear. The wilderness of sadness, jealous, and selfishness. The wilderness of sickness, hurt, and abandonment. The gospel of Luke is highlighting the wilderness of feeling unloved, not belonging and not good enough. God has just declared God’s love, belonging and delight to Jesus. God said. **“You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you.”** After forty days in the wilderness Jesus perception of God’s loving, sustaining, caring presence was fading. Likely you have been in that wilderness where everything is going wrong, you can’t seem to get ahead or catch a break, you find it difficult to give and receive love, and your relationships are weakened by your frustration and fatigue.

Wilderness moments are where all of us are bombarded with temptation. Ronald Allen wrote. “The fundamental temptation is to embrace the idols, rulers, values and behaviors of the old age and to turn away from God and the values and practices of the coming Kingdom of God. The temptation is to settle for the way things are (injustice, scarcity, hatred, sadness, violence, slavery, stockpiling, death and worship of money, sex, success and beauty) and to ignore the glory of the coming Kingdom of God with (grace, abundance, love, joy, peace, belonging, sharing, abundant eternal life and worship of God).” Pastor Lisa Kenkeremath said. “At its heart, temptation is not about inappropriate desires, but the temptation to be someone other than who God intends us to be. The real temptation Jesus had to fight was self-doubt.”

Jesus was tempted by the devil. Pastor Lisa said, “One definition of the devil is: “any adversary of God—anyone who restricts or obstructs what God intends for human life.” The devil could be any number of Jesus’ own followers. Remember, Jesus had to say to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan!” when Peter suggested that there ought to be an easier, safer way for Jesus to exercise his Lordship, than by way of a cross. By this definition, the “devil” could be your best friend, or your spouse, or someone else who believes they are acting in your best interest. The “devil” could be you, yourself—that little voice that hammers away at your sense of belonging, whispers taunting things to undermine your self-confidence and makes you feel the need to “prove” yourself, or tells you that the expedient course is the best course. It is the voice that says, “Can what I am thinking of doing be wrong, if everybody is for it?” or conversely, “Can what I am doing be right, if everybody is against it?” That was the question prompted by Jesus’ own disciples who tried to talk him out of following the path of obedience to God. That’s the devil all of us know.” Pastor Lisa continues. “Our vulnerable points are easily discovered. Just appeal to our pride, awaken our fear of disapproval and rejection, threaten our sense of security,

suggest an easier way, and we are tempted to be less than the people God intends us to be, and not even know that that is what is happening. It is a good idea to be aware of our demons, so we don't have an identity crisis when they visit." The devil then is everyone from ourselves, to others, to things, anything or anyone that distracts us from God, to a spirit of evil. Temptation is strongest when we are having a hard time perceiving that we are God's beloved, cherished child. Temptation is strongest when we start forgetting that we are God's people forgiven, cleansed, healed, renewed and sealed in baptism as Christ's sibling forever.

Luke 4:1c-4 "In the wilderness, where Jesus was tempted by the devil for forty days. Jesus ate nothing all that time and became very hungry. Then the devil said to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread." But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone.'"

The temptation is a sense of security, and the fear of being without resources to survive. Jesus was hungry but was not starving. Bread was a want not a need. The temptation was to take a shortcut, compromising, going for the quick fix. The devil urged Jesus to use his power to satisfy his personal fear and hunger instead of trusting God, trusting his ability to work for pay, trusting others to grow and bake bread that he could purchase. The temptation is a sense of worth, belonging and love. The devil said. **"If you are the Son of God,"** The temptation is clouding Jesus perception for God just declared. **"You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you."**

Luke 4:5-8 "Then the devil took Jesus up and revealed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. "I will give you the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them," the devil said, "because they are mine to give to anyone I please. I will give it all to you if you will worship me." Jesus replied, "The Scriptures say, 'You must worship the Lord your God and serve only God.'"

We become like whoever or whatever we worship. The temptation is to become like the world rather than become like Christ. Even the best governments, earthly kingdoms and rulers have faults, imperfections, greed, desire for control, manipulation, exploitation, hatred and violence. When we worship government and leaders we perpetuate their imperfections. When we worship God we bring the loving perfection of the Kingdom of God to earth. Governments never truly rule the world they come and go. God and the Kingdom of God are eternal. The temptation is to own or control the world or a part of the world or someone. God is the owner of all. Everything is a gift of God.

The temptation is that we can earn it. Pastor Rick Brand proclaims. "Satan shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and says to him, work hard and good things will come to you, they can all be yours. You can earn it. Work hard and good things happen is an American gospel, but it is not the Christian gospel. Work hard is not the good news of Jesus Christ. The good news is for all people. The gospel of work hard keeps leaving people out." Many people work hard, do their very best and they lose, bad things happen to them, they get sick or they are downsized. The temptation is to try and earn love, status, popularity or authority, which can lead to judgment, or exclusion or a false belief that you deserve love, blessings or salvation. God loves everyone. Everyone is God's beloved, cherished child. Grace is a free gift of love for everyone. If you have to do anything to earn it then it is not grace, it is not free. By God's forgiving, healing, renewing love we all have an honored place and belong to God's family. We are redeemed, justified, saved, and born again, not by our work rather by the work of God.

Luke 4:9-13 "Then the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, 'God will order God's angels to protect and guard you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'" Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the

Lord your God.” When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, the devil left him until the next opportunity came.””

The temptation is for needless excitement, drama and miracles. The temptation is to be a show off and make a spectacle of God. The temptation is that the very best of human kind can get us closer to God. The highest point on the Temple symbolizes the pinnacle of our religion, architecture, community, knowledge, the best of our best, yet it still does not get us close to God. God comes to us.

The irony is Jesus fed people by turning five loaves into food for over 12,000 people. Jesus does rule the world seated on the throne of resurrection glory. God did send a company of angels to roll away the stone on Easter. Temptation is a subtle shift of focus. The devil tempted Jesus to use his own power, to be in control himself. Jesus resisted the temptation by focusing his attention on God, belonging to God, the will of God and the love of God then trusted God to work through him serving others.

In all three temptations Jesus used scripture to overcome the devil. In the third temptation the devil used scripture to tempt Jesus. Scripture is abused when it is misused to serve personal purposes instead of God’s purpose. Using a little scripture may cause great harm. Scripture can be abused by taking it out of context, twisting it, and using scripture to elevate yourself, to divide, judge, and exclude people. The misuse of scripture was the temptation that some of the Scribes and Pharisees gave into and that Jesus often pointed out. We are invited to read, meditate, reflect and live the entire sweep of scripture. You can read the entire New Testament in just nine months by reading one chapter a day. Read the entire Bible in a year by reading 31/4 chapters per day. We are invited to take scripture into our heart and mind and let scripture mold us. We are invited to continually absorb scripture like a tree continually absorbs water. We are invited to let the scripture dance with our experiences, to shape us and leave a lasting legacy like the rings of a tree. We are invited to let scripture nourish us year after year, to grow us more into the likeness of Jesus. We are invited to let scripture makes us strong enough to endure every temptation and storm. We are invited to let scripture fill us with blessings, love, joy, hope and peace then share and serve others like a tree produces fruit. Scripture, the Word of God enables us to overcome temptation and enjoy abundant life.

The psalmist sings. **Psalm 1 NLT Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do. But not the wicked! They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind. They will be condemned at the time of judgment. Sinners will have no place among the godly. For the Lord watches over the path of the godly, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.**

Scripture, the Word of God enables us to overcome temptation and enjoy abundant life. The Apostle Paul writes. **Romans 10:8b-13 ““The Word is near you; the Word is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in Jesus will never be put to shame.” For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on God, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.””**

The Word is Jesus, Scripture and Holy Spirit inspired messages. The Word is near you. The Word is in your heart and mouth. You can sort out the true Word from words of temptation by what the word produces. If the word produces faith, belief, proclamation that Jesus is the resurrected Lord, love

and saving grace for everyone then that is the true Word of God because it is consistent with Jesus life and the entire sweep of scripture.

What one word does God want you to focus on for lent? What one word is the Holy Spirit placing in your heart and mind for you to meditate on day and night to renew you? What one word is God giving you to enable you to overcome temptation, to remind you that you are God's beloved child, to inspire you to lovingly serve?