

The First Sunday of Lent 2025 (9th March)

Luke 4:1-13

A Sermon by the Rev. Jackie Bullen

We have now entered the season of Lent, the time when traditionally people give things up.

This can be hard to do.

People talk about struggling to give up drinking or some particular food group.

Chocolate is a favourite to give up, but it isn't easy.

People talk about being tempted to enjoy something they are trying to give up.

Not just during Lent, this happens all year through.

Good intentions can go by the board because we are tempted.

We have just heard about Jesus being tempted in the desert.

Most of us will have been into a tearoom or café and been seduced by those delicious cakes in the glass cabinet?

Or by the aroma of the freshly filtered coffee?

Or the smell of freshly baked bread in the supermarket.

They say you should never go shopping when you are hungry because you are more likely to buy more food than you anticipated and then eat more food than you need.

Likewise, the way that goods are presented can persuade us to try and to buy.

People are paid vast sums of money to help retailers to show off their goods in the best possible way and there is no doubt that smell, taste, sight, hearing and our intellect can lead us to things that we didn't even realize we wanted or needed!

We are tempted through our senses and by things appealing to our human weaknesses.

In our reading we heard of Christ's time of being tempted in the wilderness.

For 40 days Jesus was tempted by the devil. The devil tried to appeal to Jesus' senses and to his human weakness.

The first temptation was to the very basic human need for food.

After being in the desert for some time, it is reasonable to assume that Jesus would be hungry.

This temptation was to focus on the temporary.

Now of course our physical needs are important

Without food we will die, obviously, but we also need to take care of our spiritual needs.

If we only focus on our physical needs, we could starve ourselves spiritually.

Jesus replies from scripture - 'Man shall not live by bread alone'

So, this was not just about food.

This was about breaking away from a faithful dependence on God.

This was about putting our trust in our own ability, our own ability to determine the outcome of our own lives, rather than putting our trust in God.

By resisting temptation, Jesus is proving faithful to God.

The second temptation is different

The Devil takes Jesus to a high place and shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in an instant.

Have all the kingdoms of the world really been given to the devil? Does the devil have the authority to make this offer?

According to John 8:44 the Devil is a liar but Jesus neither acknowledges his authority nor challenges it.

My guess would be that the vast majority of us have never been directly tempted to fall down and worship the devil, but we may well have been offered a shortcut to what we feel we need or deserve.

The devil was offering a kingdom without the need for the cross. Power without pain.

Jesus knew what lay before Him – He knew the pain and torture that were to be His and Satan was offering Jesus a way to gain authority without going through all of that.

All Jesus had to do was fall down and worship Satan just once. Nobody else would even be there to see it

No one else would have to know. Well, no one except God, and that was the key. Jesus knew that there could be no shortcuts.

If there were shortcuts taken, then he could not be the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus replied once again with Scripture.

Straight from Deuteronomy 6 - 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'
So, what might this mean to us?

There is danger in taking shortcuts.

Shortcuts can be very problematic. Have you ever noticed that shortcuts often end up causing more problems in the long run?

I'm not afraid of hard work but if there's a quicker and easier way, I'm all for it so long as it achieves the same ends but, in my experience, shortcuts usually don't work that well especially with regard to our finances, our families, our faith.

These areas of life take time and effort.

Get rich quick schemes rarely work out well.

There are no short cuts in building family relationships.

There are no shortcuts to building up our faith.

All these require effort, time, and often can cause pain and inconvenience.

The third temptation – 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.

This temptation speaks of pride – doing something dramatic and risky - showing off.

It certainly would have been making presumptions of God, taking God for granted.

Relying on special favours from God.

But Jesus again responds with scripture: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'

There are lots of issues around temptation we can draw from this reading.

Many sins including greed, ego and pride.

These are important to consider, and we should learn from them but perhaps what the devil was really trying to achieve here was to separate Christ from God the Father.

To stop Jesus completing His mission.

The devil repeatedly challenges Jesus' identity saying, "If you are the son of God" and Jesus responds with passages from scripture reaffirming his obedience to God the Father.

That is why he resisted all these temptations.

But how did he do it?

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, and this happened just after his Baptism.

Jesus received the Holy Spirit then he was tempted and through the Spirit He resisted temptation and following these 40 days being tempted in the wilderness what happened? Jesus started His ministry.

In his time in the wilderness Jesus firmly established his identity, strengthened and supported by the Holy Spirit.

And this Holy Spirit that Jesus received at His Baptism is the same Holy Spirit that all who have been Baptized received at our Baptism.

And it is available to anyone who chooses to be Baptized.

The spirit that Jesus received is the same spirit that we receive, you and me.

Lent is a time for self-examination and my prayer for this Lent is that, as Christ's identity as the Son of God was established in the wilderness through resisting temptation, through showing His faithfulness to God the Father, that our identities as the children of that same God, baptized in the same Spirit, are established and cemented in our hearts to be lived out this Lent and always. Amen