

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, February 14, 2016
Rev. Andrew Reid
Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Luke 4:1-13
"Tempted like as we are"

The temptation of Jesus. The first three Gospel writers, the Synoptics, all tell the story of the temptation in the wilderness. St Mark's account is very brief, only two verses in length, and it gives no details of how Jesus was tempted by Satan, only that he was tempted by Satan.

St Matthew and St Luke both give much fuller accounts, and include details of the three ways in which Jesus was tempted. Though in their accounts, it is the devil who tempts him. And there is one big difference between Matthew's account and Luke's account: for some reason they switch the second and third temptations. Apart from that difference, Mathew and Luke are almost word for word identical in their accounts.

All three Gospel writers place the temptation at the start of Jesus' ministry, right after he had been baptized by John in the river Jordan. They clearly see the event as in some ways a defining moment for Jesus. The way they tell it, it is as if he is wrestling with his sense of who and what he was, and of how he was to accomplish the task for which he was born into the world. Taking things right down to their absolute basics, would he accomplish his task in obedience to God, and in faithfulness to what he knew to be right, or would he accomplish it in some other way? Would he remain true to his calling, no matter what the personal cost, or would he follow another, lesser course? Would he remain true to his God and Father, or would he turn away from God to his tempter, Satan, the devil?

Of course, we know how Jesus replied:

"One does not live by bread alone."

"Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

"Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Luke 4:4,8,12.

Jesus emerged from this time of temptation with a clear sense of determination to follow his calling and accomplish the task for which he was born into the world. The way Matthew and Mark tell it, once Jesus had faced down the tempter, it was over. Matthew and Mark both say that angels came and ministered to him - Matthew 4:11, Mark 1:13. Luke ends his account by saying that *When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time* Luke 4:13. That rather enigmatic ending suggests that Jesus faced similar testing, if not the same temptations, at some other point in his earthly life. Of course, Matthew, Mark and Luke speak of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane agonizing over whether to go through what lay ahead. Maybe that was the opportune time that Luke spoke of.

But that is pretty high level stuff. What do the temptations say to mere mortals like us today?

'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.' Luke 4:3.

Take the easy way out. Look after yourself. You have the power to feed yourself. You have the

power to feed as many as you want. Why not just do it? But attend to your personal needs first. Why put yourself through all this? Get comfortable. Take the easy way. No-one will be any the wiser.

But Jesus says, *“One does not live by bread alone.”* Luke 4:4.

‘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.’ Luke 4:6-7.

Lower your standards. Compromise. A little bit of give and take is called for here. All that really matters is the end result. And the end justifies the means. Why put yourself through all the stress and pressure of doing it any other way? Just relax, give in, and let things take their natural course. Who's going to know?

But Jesus says, *“Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”* Luke 4:8.

*‘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.”’* Luke 4:9-11.

Go for the glitz. Everyone loves a show, and everyone loves a showman. So why not give them what they want? Dazzle the crowds with your magical powers. Pander to the spectacular, be amazing, be sensational. It's not as if you would be buying cheap popularity or attracting an easy following. Nothing like that. Not at all. Really.

But Jesus says, *“Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”* Luke 4:12.

It's not just a case of "Just say no." Life is not as simple as that, and temptation is not as simple as that. But this much is sure: having been tempted in every way as we are, Jesus offers all of us who are tempted strength to look the tempter in the face and say, 'No. In the name of God, no.'