

RELEASE
[written in oral form]

Luke 4:1-13
Lent 1, Year C

March 10, 2019
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[present ugly ceramic dog]

Can I tempt you with this lovely, one of kind, fine ceramic dog?
It is regularly, \$99.95, but for today only, you can purchase it for \$59.95,plus shipping and handling.
You are saving \$40.00. Imagine what you could do with 40 extra dollars?
Not only that, for the next hour, I will add this top quality leash at no extra cost.
And, if that is not enough, I'll toss in this stainless steel choker chain.

All yours for just \$59.95, plus shipping and handling.
This is a limited time offer. You know I can't do this all day.

So, take advantage of this great sale by [12:30], and save \$40.

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Are you tempted to buy this? ????

I hope not, but the point is that we must fully understand what "temptation" means.

(Before I continue, there is a back story to the dog. A year ago, at Christmas time, the youth had a white elephant gift exchange. From that I was presented with this dog,...AND the challenge to use it in a sermon. Duh Da. Took me over a year, but I did)

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As I said, to comprehend Jesus' experience in the wilderness, we must understand Temptation.

The offer, the "seduction", by itself is NOT temptation.
Temptation is NOT being **confronted** by things / activities often deemed inappropriate, indulgent or wrong.

To be "Tempted", one must seriously consider yielding / giving in / accepting the seduction.
*This is very important to remember!

Temptation is swinging from the tipping point toward a seduction.

To be sure, *it varies per person whether the issue / item / presentation is a temptation or not. Somebody here may really want this dog. []*

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When we are tantalized at a weak and vulnerable point, it is easy for the seduction to slip into temptation / to when we consider yielding.

Temptation itself is not bad, ..... but giving in could be..... depending on what it is.

To the text and the setting of the story:

Jesus was in the early days of his ministry. It was a time of exciting expectation, as most such beginnings are. I'm sure there was some hesitation and reservations, including uncertainty about the exact role of the Messiah. Still, he had been affirmed and blessed. He was on the emotional mountain top.

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I have learned to mark Spiritual highs with a red flag. Because, I know I will soon be surprised and assaulted. I interpret that as an effort to bring me down and hurt my connection with God. I do believe in the presence and intentional activity of evil, call it the demonic or whatever.

This is what happened to Jesus. Luke tells us that Jesus was Full of God's Spirit, and then led by the Spirit into the Wilderness.

This wasn't necessarily a bad thing. I find the wilderness to be a place of honesty. In the wilderness, there is no pretending. Wilderness can be a mirror for the soul. A place where one discovers grit, values and personal integrity.

In a way, it is like a testing place, and that was the case for Jesus.

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We all tend to behave better when life is easy and under control.

“Wilderness” can be a hostile environment / a place without comfort, without needs being met..... where desires are not fulfilled and dreams fade away.

Wilderness can render a sense of emptiness: when one feels hunger and thirst, be it physical or spiritual.

For Jesus, Wilderness was a place of deprivation / a place of feeling very “alone.”

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Sometimes when we search for the new / for direction or for our own souls... we enter into a metaphorical wilderness.

Jesus was in **the** wilderness, and remember.... he was also fasting.

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*I've never fasted for more than a couple days, but I've seen people who have fasted for over a week, and..... they got REALLY strange. I can't imagine 40 days.*

And, there is no doubt that during the entire time, Jesus was tempted to stop fasting / to have pizza delivered or something.

I also imagine that he contemplated getting out of the “Messiah” profession.... and maybe return to carpentry ..... or open a little shop by the sea????

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Wilderness periods are serious-to-the-bones Hard Times – a purging time, and a real test of character and the depth of one's values.

When Jesus was at his weakest point, near death and still NOT lead out of the wilderness, he was confronted with three very seductive offers. Jesus was tempted.

Yes, tempted! This means that Jesus could have given in and was thinking about yielding. Jesus **was** in deep trouble...because he was listening to evil. Luke calls it the Devil. No matter the name, Jesus was slipping into a conversation with evil.

Nevertheless, he displayed great wisdom by not debating. Engaging in a debate when tempted is a step closer to giving in. That conversation empowers the Lizard brain to do the thinking.

Instead, Jesus held up his values and his deep trust in God. He did not debate. Jesus let the words of wisdom--The Bible speak for him.

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With every thought dancing with images of food, Jesus was **tempted** to turn stones into bread, ..... and I bet by this point the stones already looked like bread.

Stones to bread: Hey, ..... why NOT??? He was ordained the “son of God”, he had the power, ... besides, ..... he was all alone – NO One would know!

*Temptation pulls the hardest when NO ONE is looking / when we think we won't be caught.*

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Instead of being the founder of a fast food empire, Jesus clung to the word of God and his faith .. that God WOULD deliver him, ... and that he WAS NOT ABANDONED.

In addition, resisting the first temptation, declared: that Preserving / keeping ... FAITH, even at the edge of defeat, is greater than instant gratification for physical needs.

It was a declaration that God's Kingdom / domain transcends the immediate, and transcends self indulgence.

There is NO quick fix to problems.
God works with the natural cadence of life.

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*A BIG temptation was resisted, and... one is prone to relax, Right?*

So, ...it only makes sense that Evil came right back with another temptation.

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All the cities, governments, armies and people of the world flashed before Jesus eyes, and Jesus could hear the Devil--the image of evil – saying, “I'll give you the world.

You can have authority over all of it, Just simply LUST after power and follow the evil way--the way of selfishness and greed.”

It was a invitation to own more than was his to own.
It was the lure to take control for a greater good!

It was a mandate for the “END justifies the Means!”

It was a call to worship all that is NOT of God and God’s way.

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*It is fascinating how we can rationalize a temptation.*

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Probably, Jesus was tempted with rationalizations for ending all war, world hunger and poverty. He could have, if he took control of the world.

It all seemed so easy, so logical – just give up on a God who makes demands, works through imperfect people and often takes “way” too long. Seems to make sense to Just do it yourself!

This is a very common temptation – which is to take control.

And, of course, “we can do it better!” We can manipulate things, especially if no one is looking and especially if we have the power! And, it may all be legal.

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The End does NOT justify the means..... or the person.

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Thoughts can really get distorted when we are tempted.

Temptations swirl with half truths and outright lies, especially this one.

The Great Deceiver was offering **what was NOT even his to give away!**

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Drained, with sweat running down Jesus’ face, Jesus cried out NO!

It was a cry of deep trust:

**NO, I will ONLY serve God. I will Only follow God’s way, regardless of all the counter rationalizations, and..** regardless if following God will take longer or means hardships and struggle.

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Our own and the world’s Salvation, healing and Peace..... only come from the wholeness with God, and NOT by trying to put the broken pieces of the world together as we see fit.

God’s way is a trusting journey.

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Then, likely a sense of satisfaction filled Jesus mind. He had resisted two Huge Temptations. So, it makes sense to want a little Reward / a little recognition for “Such a Fine” display of endurance and loyalty.

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THUS,..... the Third Temptation: ENTITLEMENT.

It was time for God to pay up.

It was time to test God’s devotion and providence.

The demonic voice whispered in Jesus' ear,, Surely if you were to jump from the peak of the temple roof, "God would send angels to catch you!YOU ARE God's ONLY son, after all, surely God would do that much for you."

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And, it makes sense. Jesus had endured a lot of abuse, and remained loyal. He did what was right— a demonstration of appreciation was due. ???

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The painful thought of "Why ME?"....rises from the sense of "entitlement"..... that feeling of "I deserve better / I am special.

Maybe a little test won't hurt. ??

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Somewhere / somehow..., perhaps deep within his soul, Jesus realized that FAITH does NOT put God to the test.

Faith is Not a religion, but rather..... a total trust in God / in God's way in spite of all odds, in spite of being alone and in spite of a the present pain and emptiness.

Faith is believing / fully trusting God, ..... and that is the path out of the wilderness. It is the beginning of being released / redeemed.

I think to get to that point requires confession. A confession that declares, "I'm not in control. I can't do this thing called life without God."

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Luke states that the Devil gave up, for the time being,... but would TRY again, later.

Jesus was God's son and he was human. Jesus fought temptation all his life,.... all of his life!

Resisting temptation and turning to God is a lifelong process, just like fighting an addiction, and all of us are addicted to something.

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Every day, we face seduction, no matter where we are.

And, there are times when we will find ourselves within a wilderness – alone with no one watching....., ... and.... then we will Really feel the test / the temptation.

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Wilderness is where we define, clarify our identity, our belief system, ... AND.... DISCOVER OUR TRUE PASSION... and true self.

Sometimes people survive: learn, grow and find release from the demons.

And, sometimes people don't, and stay there trapped and tormented.

It is NOT easy being out there in a wilderness. We can see that from Jesus' experience.

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In 1991, as you know, I became divorced.

It was not something I wanted. It surely wasn't in my plans.

I was just finishing seminary, and I was full of great expectations.

Then, all seemed to come crashing down.

A few months later, while venting and ranting to my counsellor, he interrupted me and said, "It sounds like you are giving up on God."

I didn't answer,.....because my trust in God was pretty thin. I didn't know what to say at the time, but I thought about it while driving home.

I recall, standing by my front door thinking/ praying, "Life sucks, and it sure feels like God has forgotten me, but NO I will not / I can Not give up on God."  
My confession was that I can't do it alone. I needed God.  
Granted, my trust was shaky and weak, but it was enough to call out to God.

After 2 to 3 years, I had the hindsight to see how God had been active in my life during that wilderness time. There were so many amazing things that had happened to get me through. They were divinely orchestrated things.

I think when we fully trust God, that sort of hindsight becomes the present view -- When we simply rest in God's grace and love, no matter what.

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Jesus came out of the wilderness with a clear understanding of what kind of Messiah he was to be and what it really meant for him to be the Son of God. Jesus found himself, and the power to be himself.

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In addition, the wilderness experience demonstrates that life is difficult, that life is NOT fair..... and that sadness is primal.

Tragedy IS the human experience.
How we respond to it:..... That is what makes the difference!

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Do we confess our weakness and in trust call out to God.....or do we fight the wilderness and our demons?