

Text: Luke 4: 1-13 Temptation in the Wilderness

Title: Relationship Comes First

Date: February 21, 2010

So last Wednesday was Ash Wednesday, the official beginning of Lent. Lent is very much like Advent, in that it is a time that looks forward to one of the major celebrations of the faith. Advent looks forward to Christmas, the Day Jesus was born and Lent looks forward to Easter, the Day that Jesus rose again, defeating the power of sin and death forever. Both are joyous events- but both are not joyous seasons. You know what Advent has that Lent doesn't? Carols. You never hear anyone sing, 'Tis the season for repentance..... Or, Little Garden of Gethsemane, how bitter were your tears? See what I mean, the just don't have that touch of celebration that makes the Christmas season so spectacular.

Our problem is that we associate Lent, not with celebration, but with repentance. Don't get me wrong- Lent IS all about repentance, but our notion of repentance is way off key. Push comes to shove; most of us associate repentance with denial. We are like that kid with a lollipop- it a great big lollipop, with different colors and flavors- and mom takes the lollipop away from us because it is not good for us. Now that may well be true- but we still want that lollipop! So repentance becomes tinged with resentment. Do what you want, a lot of it now- because tomorrow it's all going to be taken away from you! That is what Mardi Gras is all about. Mardi Gras has it wrong- repentance is not about denial- it's about removing the obstacles we erect that stand in the way of our relationship with God. I don't have to prove that I am worthy of God's love- I can simply accept the fact that God has chosen to love me and act accordingly. Instead of treating Lent as the spiritual equivalent of Drivers ED, where we do what we need to do to get our driver's license, we treat Lent like Scrooges' holiday- we might have gotten Christmas presents a month and a half ago- but Lent is here to TAKE THEM AWAY!

So, this Lent, rather than adopt THAT attitude, let's focus on Lent as a time to remove obstacles. There is another word for Obstacles- and that is Temptation. Which is why we are here in Luke 4. The Synoptics agree that the Tempting in the Wilderness took place right after Jesus' baptism. We've talked about the Synoptics before, how all of Mark can be found in Matthew and Luke, suggesting that both Matthew and Luke had Mark in front of them as they began to write their gospels, adding and reorganizing their own material. For instance, both Mark and Matthew list the temptations in the order of turning stones into bread; being thrown from a Temple tower, and being led to a high mountain and being shown the kingdoms of the world, which would be all his if he only worshipped satan. Luke has a different point to make- so he changes the order:

After fasting 40 days (any similarity to the Children of Israel wandering in the wilderness for 40 years preparing to enter the Promised Land is purely intentional) Jesus is tempted by Satan himself. The first Temptation is exactly what we would think it would be- *"If you are the Son of*

*God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.*" The bread part makes all the sense in the world, but linking it with Jesus' status as God's Son give it a whole new twist. As a member of the Trinity- Jesus had provided manna in the wilderness all those years for his people. Because he is a member of the Trinity- he know that in the not too distant future that he will be feeding thousands. This temptation is all about focusing all of his powers on himself- thus short circuiting being the Messiah. Sneaky.

Now, no one here has any delusions about being a member of the Trinity. If you do, talk to me and I will hook you up with a good psychiatrist. But we too are tempted to focus only on bread- that is- only on our material well being. There is just more to life than ME, MY & MINE. We know from personal experience that we are happiest when we are invested in other people and most miserable when we focus exclusively on ourselves. Yet we find ourselves obsessed with taking care our ourselves, doing all we can to build up material wealth as a buffer against what might happen. Our possessions wind up owning us, and we spend even more defending what we have against an unknowable future. Now there is nothing wrong with material wealth if we keep it in perspective, remembering God gives us what HE does to share. How do we keep this perspective? By doing exactly what Jesus did- "One does not live by bread alone." Comes from Deuteronomy 8 when Moses reminds his people that God have them manna in the wilderness to humble them and to remind them that God is in control. Rely on God's promises and you will keep things in perspective.

Satan's second gambit is all How to achieve the goals of the Messiah. Satan claims to have authority over all the earth and if Jesus simply compromises with the values of this world then all will be his. Now, as a member of the Trinity-Jesus already has authority over all the kingdoms of this world. What Satan wants is Jesus to recognize his claim to authority – a false claim at that. Given that so much of what Jesus did, from teaching to casting out demons was based on Jesus being God in the Flesh- to recognize Satan's claim of authority would be the end of the story.

This is probably the most insidious of the temptations that face us- how do we deal with this world's values? Our temptation is 2 fold- we can either compromise with the vales of our hyper sexualized materialistic culture - or we can spend all or our time building walls to defend ourselves lest we are contaminated. Contaminated? By the people Jesus came to save? How whacked is that? Look at Jesus' response, it comes right out of Deuteronomy 6:13. Moses is reminding his people to recall all that God has done for them – so that when they come into the Promised Land they will not seduced by the idols that those people worship. Moses says serve, Jesus says worship- it amounts to the same thing. We cannot be light in the darkness if we cut ourselves off from the source of our Light.

At this point, according to Luke, Satan takes Jesus to the highest tower of the Temple and quotes Psalms, in effect saying that didn't the Psalmist promise that God would not allow you to be harmed? Again we have the "IF you are the Son of God..." Satan is tempting Jesus to

ask God for a sign, on outward manifestation that he is in God's favor. Satan doesn't get it- Jesus being a member of the Trinity knows full well that one day he is going to be in Jerusalem and God is going to allow him to be harmed. Jesus doesn't need an external sign that he is in God's favor- he KNOWS it in ways that Satan cannot begin to understand.

But we do not have the advantage that Jesus did- no one has died and made us God, as the saying goes. We often find ourselves looking for outward signs that we are in God's favor. If everything is going well, then God is smiling. If its snowing- we are in trouble. We ask, why do bad things happen to good people, assuming that they are not supposed to happen to good people. There is nothing in our experience to suggest that. the simple truth is that bad things happen to everybody- the sign of God's favor promised to us is that we do not have to go through this alone.

Jesus' response to Satan comes again comes from Deuteronomy 6. Moses is reminding his people that they should not put God to the test the way that they did at Massah. The story is in Exodus 17, after being led all over the wilderness, after being fed manna the people whine to Moses, "why did you bring us out here to die of thirst?" Moses complains to God, God tell him to strike a stone with his staff and presto- change- we've got water! What, God brought you out of Egypt in safety and freedom, led you by pillar of fire and made sure you were fed and now, because things aren't going your way you wonder if you are in God's favor? What's it going to take? Just because we have challenges, challenges that force us to rely on God are we going to thing that we are no longer loved and cherished by God? C'mon, he came in person; died for our sins; rose again on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day; empowered us by the Holy Spirit- what do we want already?!?

This is the point that Luke is making- for his readers already know what Jesus has done for them- We already are in God's favor! God has already removed the obstacles that stand between us. The only obstacles that remain are the feeble attempts we employ to hide from God because we are afraid. But there is nothing to be afraid of. What Jesus modeled for us that when the inevitable temptation rears its ugly head, whether it be in the form of obsession with material well being, compromising with a sick culture of seeking assurances of God's favor; the answer is always the same- get to know God in Scripture. When we truly realize that God cherishes us and wants us to get to know him as fully as He knows us- then all those other obstacles will fade away.

So this Lent- let's start by reminding ourselves Who God is and What God has done for us in the words of the Apostles Creed.

Amen