

February 5, 2017 “Facts About Temptation” Luke 4:1-13

In our living room at 24 Sherwood Crescent in Belleville, (the room is not big) but there are 8 paintings hanging on the 3 walls. The artist was Barbara's father, the late Roy Irvine. The scenes, (they are landscapes) are all inspired by the wilderness of Northwestern Ontario. The dominant painting because of its size is called Rushing River. Barbara and I have been there. You are facing a dog leg curve in the river to the right. The banks are inclined. Boulders of jagged rock dominate the foreground. The River, Rushing River is boiling over and around the rocks as the water flow rushes toward you makes the turn and continues to tumble and rumble by you. No water fall. A continued stretch of white water rapids. The sky is blue but there are some clouds. The forest is thick, and produces a spiked appearance as the dominant trees are black spruce and balsam. As far as the eye can see, there is rushing water, rocks, and trees, disappearing into the mist and the forest up river. Wilderness! Well...wilderness in Northwestern Ontario. Not wilderness in Judea.

Luke, in writing his account of the Gospel, tells us Jesus left the Jordan where HE was baptized and was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit of God. And it is nothing like Rushing River. It is dessert. No water at all. Some times it does not rain for 10 years. Lots of rock, even mountains, but no trees of any kind. No greenery of any kind. And when you are on a significant height you see rock and sand for miles in every direction.

That is the wilderness into which Jesus was led by the Spirit of God. It is a hostile and uncomfortable place to be. Jesus was in that wilderness for 40 days. And for forty days in that wilderness

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Luke tell us Jesus was tempted by the devil. We are tempted to say...to what end? Jesus was always going to do what HIS Father in heaven wanted HIM to do. And that is where we stumble. We make a mistake when we think this was easy for Jesus to handle, easier than it would be for us to deal with. The mystery with which faith wrestles for understanding is that Jesus was and is God, and HE was at the same time human.

Jesus was led into the wilderness to fast and to pray. To spend time with God the Father, to rest in the Spirit of God, but, and it is a highly significant but, the devil comes to him in that inhospitable place, that fearful place, a place frankly I would not want to spend a day alone, without human companionship, and certainly not a night. There is little shelter. And caves do not have doors or windows. And Jesus does not eat. The fast, is part of the seriousness of this season of prayer, this seeking of the HIS Father's will, direction, and yet, what Jesus finds...is the continual companionship of the prince of darkness. And temptation, temptation, temptation.

We want to say, “but HE is Jesus. He is never going to give in, HE is never going to agree, He is never going to fall. But Jesus is a man with two natures. He is God as we are not. And at the same time HE is as human as we are. After 40 days Jesus is hungry. He is ready for a man sized dinner. He faces the choice to eat or not to eat, to eat and enjoy the taste of bread, lamb, whatever, or to continue to seek the face of HIS Father. The power of temptation,... and this is where this episode in the life of Jesus really begins...the power of temptation always begins with what we sense as real need. HE is hungry. HE has been fasting for 39 days. HE is in the 40th day. Has HE not demonstrated sufficient grit, faithfulness, passion for

the will of HIS Father?

The devil speaks to HIM. “See this rounded stone?” Jesus can see it. It is right there in front of HIM. HE could reach down and lift it up if HE wants. “If you really are the Son of God, tell this loaf-like stone to become bread.” Implied, and that means the choice is a real possibility...take it, eat it, satisfy your hunger. Use your power to satisfy your real need. If you are God's Son, surely you are not meant to suffer like this. All HE has to do is put HIMSELF first. All HE has to do is make the choice to take care of HIMSELF. It is real need that the tempter dangles before HIM. It is real choice, real possibility that the tempter urges HIM to take. Take. Eat. Satisfy your body. You could die if you don't. If you are God's Son what could be wrong with that?

The Saviour of the world, your Saviour, my Saviour. says in reply, “It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone. Because I am the Son of God, a man, I need to remember and I need to live by the commandments of my Father. Listen to what Jesus remembered and then went on to do. “Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness...forty years...to test you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. He humbled you, causing you to hunger, and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Deuteronomy 8:2 &3)

Luke is telling us Jesus gets it...before we do, before the 120 do, before the 12 do. Before anyone else does. In the midst of real need, the important thing is to be faithful, faithful to God, to

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keep his commandments. It is the secret to life. It is the way, of Jesus because HE is the Son of God, and it ought to be our way. Always.

Notice this. The devil does not argue. Does not debate. He knows who he is talking to, and he knows when there will be no giving of ground. NO compromise.

The next thing Jesus knows is HE has been lifted up. High up. Instantly, HE can see all the kingdoms of the earth. All the nations that will be and are. All the governments that will be formed, that will rule, that will exercise power and make laws. The devil tries to cut a deal. That's the name of the game. Let's make a deal. He says, he says you can have their power, you can have their splendor. Worship me and I will give you the world. All of it. It's what you want, right. The power of temptation is it has a lot to do with what we really want. Worship me. It will be yours.

Jesus replies by quoting the text of Deuteronomy 6:13. He reminds the devil, "It is written." 'Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.' Actually what that verse says is, "Fear the Lord your God, serve Him only, and take your oaths in His name." Believe in Him. Serve Him. When you dedicate yourself, do so in His name. The one public and visible sign of belief, of serving God, of dedication before God, is the act of worshiping Him in the midst of His gathered people. Participation in the worshiping congregation is the outward sign of fear of the Lord, the ultimate act of serving Him, and the demonstration of dedication to HIM. And again the devil does not argue with commandments of God.

Just as suddenly as before the scene changes. Jesus is standing on the highest point of the Temple in Jerusalem. The devil

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says, “If you are the Son of God, show me. Dive. You know, it is written that He will send His angels, God will, and they will catch you and you won't get so much as a scratch. Show me. Do it. Do what I say. The issue is proof. Spectacular proof. Undeniable proof. Proof so powerful you would not have to believe, trust, submit to anyone for anything...especially God. It is tempting...we would like a demonstration of God's power so great, the world would find itself on its knees. Churches would be full. We would not have to do half of what we do. I could really retire! How tempting...Jesus would not need to heal anyone, save anyone, be crucified for anyone. The shedding of blood becomes unnecessary if everybody understands there is proof of God's power to save Jesus.

“It is said,” Jesus replies, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test as you did at Massah.” In the book of Exodus Massah and Meribah is a place where the Hebrews questioned everything, including whether or not they were led by God or not. It is about finding another way. Jesus is offered a way out of what lies before HIM. Three years of ministry, three years of signs and wonders, three years of argument and debate, and Calvary, and the open tomb. What did the sign on the cross say? The king of the Jews. There is no other way. Jesus sees as clearly as HE ever would, there is only one way. The way to which Jesus was born. Do not put the Lord your God to the test. Do not try to find another way.

And as suddenly as this moment's arrival, temptation, 40 days of temptation, and these three specific temptations, are over. And it is time for Jesus to begin. To teach. To heal. To gather people who want what HE is and has to offer...the grace of God. The Word made flesh.

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And that is the final fact about temptation. It does not go on forever. Standing firm on what God has revealed to us in His word written, it comes to an end. The road, and opportunity to do lie before us. We take up the cross and things happen in the name of the Lord God Almighty who was, and is, and is to come.

Let us pray;

Lord lead us not into temptation. And deliver us from the tempter's presence when we find ourselves within his reach, and the reach of his voice, and the reach of his logic. Grant us insight into your word's power and truth. Help us to build our lives and times on and in your word. This we ask in Jesus marvelous name. Amen