

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

February 21, 2010
1st Sunday in Lent

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

¹When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, ²you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us." ⁴When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, ⁵you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, ⁷we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. ¹¹Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.

Luke 4:1-13

¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." ⁴Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, "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. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

⁹Then 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, ¹⁰for it is written, 'He will command

his angels concerning you, to protect you,' ¹¹and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" ¹²Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

“In Cadence”

It is the drum cadence that keeps the marching band in step. That rhythm provides the structure that keeps the whole unit in step. Marching to the drum cadence keeps the marchers in motion, forward moving, progressing...

Going forward and turning a corner—it all requires a careful listening to the pattern of the cadence in order to stay in step. If the individual marcher does not listen to the cadence he/she will be tempted to get out of step and take the easy way.

Marching involves more steps than simply walking. That is especially true when turning a corner and changing direction. The temptation is to get out of step and just turn. Such a motion can throw off the whole in sync and in rhythm nature of the entire pursuit.

The reality of it is marching does involve more steps, more deliberate steps, and more precise steps. It is tempting to just take the easier way out and get out of step. It is work and takes a deliberate intention in order to stay in step.

The drum cadence goes on—even when an individual marcher falls away and out of step.

Temptation.

It plays itself out in the drama of the gospel text today. This is not the kind of temptation we are so familiar with. We are more familiar with

the type of temptation that brings to mind that there is chocolate cake in the refrigerator.

Temptation as we have understood it has more to do with should she and then should he eat the apple. The temptation of Jesus is on a deeper level. This story of Jesus' temptation follows the story of his baptism and is a testing of his baptismal identity.

Notice the events of the temptation and there are three specific temptations here. Stones to bread. False worship. And putting God to the test.

These temptations fit into the larger story. When Israel faces these temptations in their wilderness—yes, it is not coincidence that Jesus is in the wilderness for his temptation—when Israel faces these same temptations they do not pass. They fail. Indeed all these temptations are the same as those faced in the wilderness by Israel.

They fail. Their identity is that of God's people; they turn from that identity. Jesus does not. Jesus does not deny the identity of his calling.

We know where his calling takes him. This will not be an easy road. The temptation is real—its internal—it is lived and lived out.

Would it be easier to just take over the world and rule it? The world Jesus enters is one of Roman occupation—it would relieve God's people to be liberated from that. Would it be easier to just turn stones into bread—it would solve all the hunger problems in the world.

No waiting, no work, just right now and done... To summon up all his power and just say it is mine—all of it—right here and now and behold this is how it is going to go...

Would it be easier for Jesus to do that?

Does he do that?

No. He goes the way of the cross. He does not give in to the easy way out—he does not give into the real temptation that he faces.

The crux of the matter is Jesus has been given the script—he knows the drum cadence—he has the concept of what it will take to live out his calling. And he chose to keep in step with it. He chooses the way of God's call and plan.

That is the place where we get into trouble. We have been given the script too. We have the cadence in our knowledge and our souls. We genuinely have a real concept of how God calls us to live—but we innovate—we give in—we side step—we get out of step so much that it all spins out of control.

Those old temptations are still the temptations we face.

Stones to bread. That is the real temptation in our lives. Not that we would actually want to change stones into bread. The matter was Jesus was hungry. I mean hungry. We think we are hungry if we miss lunch.

That is not hunger. Jesus had not eaten in 40 days. He was hungry. The temptation was to give into that hunger. To give into the moment and indulge the moment was the temptation.

Jesus did not do that.

We face this temptation—as we struggle with the inability to delay gratification. When we start to see life one dimensionally—bread, bread, bread I have to have the bread now. When we give into that one

dimensionality—that having to have it one way—that’s real temptation. Insisting on having exactly what I want right now! It is a myopic view that misses and does not see the broader perspective.

Stones to bread. Putting God to the test.

Do we do that? Would we do that? Little ‘ole us do that?

Sure we do. Ever bargained with God? We do that all the time, “Okay, Lord, you give me this that I want, and I will do this other.”

It can be very well intentioned. Wanting healing or health for someone we love—wanting to be made whole or help someone else out.

That is well intentioned, but anytime we start to say, “God if you, I will...” Then we are getting into trouble. We are getting into trouble because then we are testing God.

Will God come through in our way? That’s bargaining—it is making a deal.

We do not have a deal with God. We have a commitment. We have promise. We have pure love. Not a deal.

God promises us that God will be present with us to sustain us come what may. And we are to commit ourselves to that. The temptation is that we take a “God owes me” perspective rather than the God loves me perspective.

Stones to bread. Putting God to the test. False worship.

Notice the lie in this temptation. We have the persona of the devil saying—“I’ll give you all of this—all you can see if you just fall down and worship me.” That’s a lie because it was not devil’s to give away.

This temptation is the one we face when we want stability in our lives and community and circle. We want it all to feel right and be right.

And we want it all to feel successful and be successful. We will do what it takes to make it happen. We give into that temptation. Success and security. We rely on them.

When those things of this world and this age—when all that: money, people, cars, homes, vacations, stocks, mutual funds, clothes—you name it—when those things become our success and our stability—oh yes, we have given into temptation.

Those things—whatever makes that punch list in our lives—those things become our measure of success and our stability. As that happens we have given into the temptation—see, it is a false God and false worship too.

All of that which our world and culture tell us to value and are necessary cannot sustain us beyond the moment. The stability we think we have is not real—it is not stable at all.

There is that temptation to try and get to the point where we have control over our world and our future. Hear that desire and the struggle for it is the voice: “All these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me.”

But it does not work. It cannot.

This temptation is where it comes alive—it is where it really starts to cut in deep. Because this temptation is an echo of what will occur at the end of the Gospel.

This is where Jesus will end up—triumphant, victorious, ruler over all. Possessing the whole world and everything in it—that is how it will come to be.

The temptation is to get there without going through the cross.

That is re-writing the script. It is stepping out of cadence. That's not how it is to be. There had to be the cross.

You know friends—this temptation really does nail it for us. We want the easy way. We want to make it simple for us. To give us the stuff we need and want right now—oh we love the immediate. Right now, and the easy way—especially without going the way of the cross.

God calls us—yes calls us into this difficult way. God calls us to go the way of the cross.

It is the way that right now is not easy or light—but it is the way that transforms and changes both our own life and the life of others. The way is not easy or light—but it is the way that leads to life.

It is about living in cadence with the intention of God. Will we live the script? Will we stay in step?

Jesus stayed in step. Jesus lived the script. Will we?