**10th March message**

**Reading Luke 4:1-13**

**Jesus, 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.**

**Message**

**In a little book on Christian leadership by Henri Nouwen called ‘In the Name of Jesus’, Nouwen reflected on some temptations which leaders face, based on the temptations of Christ. Who knows how much of it has rubbed off in forming today’s message, but in preparing this I was drawn to remember that book, and so I credit Henri with the basis of this message.**

**Are we every tempted to take matters into our own hands to relieve or to bypass suffering, when it might be God who is leading us through it for a purpose? Are we ever tempted to claim more than is rightfully ours? Or to grab whatever we can in this life at the expense of our souls? Are we ever tempted to talk ourselves up and to make ourselves look spectacular? This passage is primarily about Jesus and some specific temptations he faced at the beginning of his ministry. But, as we’ve been noting already, Jesus entered fully into humanity and suffered all the things we suffer and so, we can glean some thoughts for ourselves on handling temptations as we go along.**

**Jesus went into the wilderness following his baptism. We can see him on a high and full of the Holy Spirit.**

**The wilderness. For Jesus, this was an actual place. Metaphorically we probably all know wilderness times. The Spirit led him while he was there. It does not say the Spirit led him to the wilderness, it says the Spirit led him while he was in the wilderness. When the pressure goes on and we’re being tested its so easy to believe that God is absent from us and we have to cry out to him as if he’s not right there. But, in Jesus’ dark hours the Spirit of God was right there with him, leading him, helping him to negotiate the time.**

**We are reminded that when we are on a high, after something wonderful has happened to us and we might feel as though we are invincible, that is when we can easily fall. When we feel on top of the world, we can be vulnerable to temptation. In Cricket, how often it is that a batsman will go out just after a milestone: they bring up a 50 or a 100 and feel invincible and so play a silly shot or they lose concentration and get out. More seriously, we are constantly hearing of top level sports people, musicians, business and political leaders who are being exposed for giving in to one temptation after another when they were at the very top of their game. Beware the bubble of invincibility.**

**But Jesus, was there in the wilderness for 40 days and nights. He came down to earth with a bump. He’s famished – literally we begin to starve to death without food for 40 days. It is equally true that when we are at the bottom of our resources we are vulnerable as well. When we’re tired, drained of energy, that’s when we can feel like the world is against us or like we’re no good.**

**The Devil had been at work through the 40 days, but it was at the end of them that he stepped up the pressure: If you are the Son of God… command this stone to become a loaf of bread.**

**Satan’s tactic is to try to put doubt into us. To Eve the serpent asked did God really tell you not to eat of this tree. Here: and again in the third temptation. If you really are the son of God…? Turn this stone into bread. A really important lesson to learn about temptation is not to fight it head on. Jesus didn’t fight back, he didn’t argue the point, saying how dear you question who my father is. He let the provocation flow over him. Instead he drew on scripture to counter the attack.**

**The Devil is quite predictable in his energies. He’ll attack us where we are weak. Jesus is famished, craving daily bread, and so he targets the weak point – go on, make some bread, you know you want to, you’re starving. The temptation was to relieve his suffering, to shorten up the time of trial. How often do we want our own sufferings to be cut short and how often do we want to remove someone else’s suffering?**

**Jesus answered with scripture – one does not live by bread alone. How important when we are at a low, and when we are being tested / tried, to cling to God’s word. Jesus had other food which sustained him, that was the word of God. Despite his physical hunger, he was upheld and strengthened through this time by the truths and promises of Scripture. Scripture helps us to stay on track when we are tempted to stray. Later he would draw on this analogy and assert that he himself was the bread of life.**

**When that tactic failed the Devil led Jesus upon to a high place and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, all its wealth, all its splendour and he promised to give it all to him if he would bow in worship of him.**

**The devil is a liar too, did the devil have the authority to give the nations to Jesus? No: the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.**

**But again, Jesus didn’t give Satan credit by arguing with him, Jesus knew his scripture and replied – no you shall only worship God and serve him only.**

**In our careers and for our families, there is the temptation to take the world at the expense of our soul. People can go for wealth, power, and prestige rather than stay true to seeking first the Lord and his kingdom. In God’s kingdom, a church leader can assert in different ways, this is my territory and don’t you mess with it. No matter how much personal appeal they have or how gifted they are, be wary of such leaders.**

**Maybe at the heart of it here there is something about power and wanting to be able to have it all so we can be in control, but when we serve the Lord, it is the Lord who directs our paths we go his way not our own way.**

**We take our example and are to have the same attitude which was in Christ. A point which could be made over all of the temptations but which is possibly most clearly here is that Satan was trying to tempt Jesus to sidestep his suffering on the cross. As God’s son He had all the earth anyway, but he humbled himself and went through the cross for our salvation. As the beautiful hymn in Philippians proclaims: Though he was God,
    he did not think of equality with God
    as something to cling to.
7Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
    he took the humble position of a slave
    and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,
8    he humbled himself in obedience to God
    and died a criminal’s death on a cross.**

**9Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
    and gave him the name above all other names,
10that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
    in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
    to the glory of God the Father.**

**When Satan tempted him with, just bow to me and you’ll get all this, the temptation was to sidestep the cross and take what was rightfully his without going through the suffering. Especially in lent, leading up to Easter we can reflect on the choice of Jesus to accept suffering as the way of our heavenly Father and we can consider how we might imitate Jesus in our response to suffering.**

**The last temptation is from the top of the high point on the temple and it’s a temptation towards wanting to misuse God’s power for our own ends. The Devil quotes scripture himself, saying how God would save him with his angels if he threw himself off. But Jesus didn’t need to show off God’s power, with a flashy, look at me stunt. True he might have been swept up by the angels, but power and especially God’s power is not to be used for one’s own purposes to look good or do spectacular things.**

**It is a very natural thing to want to look good, be seen to be competent, have high levels of achievement. The work of Christ in our lives, knowing who we are in Him, can leave us without needing to blow our own trumpets or make ourselves look better than we really are.**

**The desire to create something when it is not the right time or in God’s will,**

**The desire for power and control**

**The desire to use God’s power for our own ends, to look good, to be spectacular.**

**We can measure our lives against these three temptations. Do we seek to run our lives in our own way, in our own strength, or do we trust in Jesus to supply all our needs, physical and other, and so live out our lives trusting in him?**