

Devil in the Details

06 March 2022

Call to Worship Psalm 91

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the LORD,

“My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.”

Because you have made the LORD your refuge,
the Most High your dwelling place,

No evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

**On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your
foot against a stone.**

Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.

With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

Great is thy faithfulness

Thomas Obediah Chisholm, William Marion Runyan

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Prayer of adoration and confession

<http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocC/C20lent1.htm>

Above all earthly power and authority

reigns your almighty meekness, O generous Creator.

Give thanks to God, whose goodness endures forever.

Beneath all human pity and tenderness

runs your everlasting mercy, O generous Saviour.

Give thanks to God, whose goodness endures forever.

Through all laughter and all tears

flows your eternal intimacy, O generous Counsellor.

Give thanks to God, whose goodness endures forever.

Earth and heaven are filled with your glory

and we are the recipients of grace upon grace,

O generous God of our salvation!

Give thanks to God, whose goodness endures forever.

Seek the Saviour while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.

For he will have mercy and abundantly pardon.

Since even when we give our best and strongest love to your service, we still fall short of the glory you intended for us; Lord have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

Since even in our moments of sharpest clarity and wisdom we are yet creatures of profound ignorance and much foolishness; Christ have mercy.

Christ have mercy.

Since you know how hard it is for us to see your truth clearly, to follow it fully, and to love you completely; Lord have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

Gracious God, the magnitude of our sins is far outweighed by the magnitude of your mercies. As your grateful people we turn to you in trust, asking through Christ Jesus that our sins may be forgiven and our foolishness overruled by your abundant grace. Through this same Jesus Christ.

Amen

Notices

The Peace

Reading 1 Luke 4:1-4

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ² where 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. ³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." ⁴ Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.' "

Reflection 1

As I pondered the scripture for today, I couldn't help thinking of the song by the Spice Girls, 'Wannabe.' In it they sing, 'Now tell me what you want, what you really, really want.' It seemed like a very good summary of what today's reading is all about.

'Hey, Jesus, tell me what you want, what you really, really want.'

Before we begin to dig into what Jesus really, really wanted, let's take a moment to think about what we really, really want. I'll give you a minute to think about it then we can maybe have a go at making a bit of a list.

Just in case you are concerned that my list seems a little unbalanced I am going to come to the faith side of things next. I want us to focus in on those things that often stand in for faith, especially when things are more difficult.

Here's my list, I wonder how many things on my list are similar to yours.

- Connection with family and friends (Love)
- Food
- A safe, warm place to live
- Freedom to choose without people shouting at me or worse
- The ability to do the things that bring me fulfilment and satisfaction

It's fair to say that there would be a priority in the list should I have to choose, but I think that about covers what I really, really want.

Bringing faith into the story I would want to be able to have a living and dynamic relationship with Jesus.

The thing I find interesting is that it is exactly that list of things that the devil is focussing in on when he comes to tempt Jesus. I could call it sustenance,

connection, and choice. Those things that speak to our existence and identity. In other words, 'How do I live?' and, 'Who am I?'

We could go all philosophical and look at sayings like Descartes, 'I think, therefore I am.' Or Shakespeare's, "This above all: to thine own self be true..." All of which bears thinking about but is a little deeper than we have time to go today.

Rather, I want to take some time with the practical details of why these are temptations and how insidious they can become if we take our eyes off the ball.

We shall begin at the beginning. Food. To this I will add shelter and clothing as they are all of a kind – physical needs that every living creature has in one way or another. If we do not get enough of any of these we will likely die. So the question then is, 'How is it a temptation to need to eat?' And the answer is that it is not a temptation to need food. If any one of us was at the end of 40 day fast it is perfectly appropriate to be ravenously hungry. The temptation here is of a very different kind. The devil plays on Jesus' privileged position as the Son of God. You have the power to do anything you want. You don't have to be subject to the limitations of normal human beings. Why be hungry when you have such power at your disposal?

Jesus' response is short and to the point. 'One does not live by bread alone.' In other words, 'It's not about what I want, it is about what God wants.' I suspect that deep, deep down most of us struggle with that concept. I don't want to cast nasturtiums so I will speak to me and you can judge for yourself. In my head I get that God comes first. I understand the concept that all I have belongs first and foremost to God. That I live and move and have my being in God alone. And I regularly find my head and my heart clashing on the details of how that looks. Does it mean I sell all I have and give it to the poor? Surely then I would be poor and reliant on others and what is the point of that? What does it look like to rely on God alone? Do I have to live without anywhere to lay my head to properly emulate Christ? I don't think I have the courage to do that by choice. I think that it is this weakness in me that the devil was hoping to exploit in Jesus. Of course, you are all much more controlled than I am, but I get it if you struggle, just a little bit. More in a moment. Let's sing together.

Lord, I lift your name on high

Rick Founds

Lord I lift your name on high

Lord I love to sing your praises

I'm so glad you're in my life

I'm so glad you came to save us

You came from heaven to earth to show the way

From the earth to the cross my debt to pay

From the cross to the grave

From the grave to the sky

Lord I lift your name on high

Reading 2

Luke 4:5-13

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

'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.' "

⁹ Then 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, ¹⁰ for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you,'

¹¹ and

'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' "

¹² Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

¹³ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Reflection 2

The second temptation we find is what I will call the temptation of connection. For Jesus this came in the form of worship – would he worship the devil in exchange for the adulation of the world? We can be sure the devil wasn't making it up because it would not otherwise be any kind of temptation. In effect the devil was saying that by forming a relationship with him, Jesus could short circuit the journey to the cross. He could save all the heartache and pain.

Just come over to the devil's side and the job would be done, quickly and painlessly. Jesus' relationship with God would be severed, but everything else would be so much easier. And everyone would like him. How cool would that be!?

Just like the first temptation all of us experience this in some form or another. For some it is the longing for relationships lost. For others it can be a craving for recognition or even power. We search for shortcuts to obtain what we desire. We tend to only notice this sort of behaviour in deranged lunatics like Donald Trump or Vladimir Putin. Their naked abuse of power to obtain what they want – the adulation of the crowd, the restoration of historical glory would be comical if it didn't have such ghastly consequences for normal people. But how different are we, really? What might we do in a place of absolute power? What might we do if we could reset our relationships or restore broken connections? I think the old map warnings, 'There lie dragons,' would be a suitable response. It puts me in mind of the movie Bruce Almighty when Bruce responds to every prayer with, 'Yes.' Chaos and disaster is the outcome.

Jesus sees through the devil's offer to understand the outcome of stepping out of relationship, of connection with God. God's way may seem to be filled with pain and disappointment, but it is far better than the alternative.

Lastly, we come to the temptation of choice. 'You can choose to do anything you like, Jesus. Look, step off this tall building and you will suffer no consequences.' Jesus' response is to be obedient to call God has placed on his life.

I think this is the most insidious of the temptations. There is a sense in which it doesn't really matter beyond an appeal to Jesus' vanity. Are you really who you say you are? The desire to prove that the devil is talking to the actual Son of God must have been strong by now. Put the devil in his place, show him who is boss here.

It raises the question of who is boss in our lives. Does God genuinely get to choose how I live? Or is it a case of me giving God a little bit here and there just to keep things moving along. I'm really the one in charge of my life and God gets a look in when I am in the right mood. I've had a good week this week – what would you like me to do today. It's been a bit of a struggle this week, you can wait, God, until I'm feeling better.

I could see it as a rather controversial Christian Tui billboard – Everything I am is yours, God. Yeah, Right! I know, not going to make many people happy with that quip, in part because most of us know it is true, even if we won't admit it in public. Perhaps the song should go, 'Everything I am, well, most of it, or at least some of it, sometimes, is yours, God.' It's not an attempt to be mean. It is being honest about our humanity. Even Paul admitted to not getting it right all the time. I think it should be OK for us to admit the same.

In the end, my point is that the temptations the devil visited on Jesus are the same temptations all of us face every day. Jesus showed us a way to deal with those temptations – it may work for us sometimes and not so much at other times. The great thing is that God knows. God understands. And God loves us anyway. I suspect that the most important detail the devil doesn't want us to notice is that the temptations weren't really the main issue. The main issue was Jesus' relationship with God. It is the same main issue for you and for me. Not, 'How did I screw up today?' but 'How is my relationship with God?' That really is the most important detail.

We Pray

God of thieves, prostitutes, and beggars, we come to you knowing we fall to temptation with dismaying frequency. No sooner do we think we have found a high point than we are falling off our self-made pedestals, seemingly right back where we started. Help us to get better at seeing the temptations coming and keeping them beyond arm's length. And help us to get better at coming to you when we fail and restoring our relationship with you. In Jesus, through Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Ten Thousand Reasons

Matt Redman

Bless the Lord O my soul, O my soul

Worship His Holy name

Sing like never before, O my soul

I'll worship Your Holy name

The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning

It's time to sing Your song again

Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me

Let me be singing when the evening comes

You're rich in love and You're slow to anger

Your name is great and Your heart is kind

For all Your goodness I will keep on singing
Ten thousand reasons for my heart to find

And on that day when my strength is failing
The end draws near and my time has come
Still my soul will sing Your praise unending
Ten thousand years and then forevermore

Offering

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning>

Mighty God, as we remember the strength of Jesus facing the temptation offered by the devil, we remember too clearly how the temptations of food, of authority, and power have overcome us. We've been tricked to believe our wants were needs and more is always better. May we offer our gifts to you this day with generosity and gratitude; strengthen us to resist temptation that would present security or power in anyone but you. In Christ, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for ourselves and others

<http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocC/C20lent1.htm>

God of infinite resourcefulness, help us to pray for others that we may come to love them, and having loved them, watch out for those specific occasions when you would have us serve them.

For those whom we find repugnant: the abusers and exploiters, the rapists and murderers, the sadistic and the apathetic; for them we pray:

May the grace which nurtures us, work in them for your glory.

For the victims of inhumanity; the oppressed and the despairing, those sexually corrupted and then thrown aside, the abused child, battered spouse, neglected grandparent, and the tortured prisoner; for them we pray:

May the grace which nurtures us, work in them for your glory.

For people who are easily swayed to do evil; in school or home, at work or in the pub, in sporting club or politics, police force or trade union, in the ordained ministry or in the medical professions; for them we pray:

May the grace which nurtures us, work in them for your glory

For the church wherever it has yielded to popularity and material prosperity, arrogance and exclusiveness, introversion and other worldliness, self-righteousness and sectarian stridency; for these we pray:

May the grace which nurtures us, work in them for your glory.

For the members of this congregation: if we have succumbed to the immoralities of our era, the self-serving habits of those around us, or allowed our faith to be diluted by cynicism or let our love for Christ grow cold; for these we pray;

May the grace which nurtures us, work in them for your glory.

Through Jesus Christ who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, holy be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

The Church's one foundation

S J Stone

The church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ, our Lord;
we are a new creation
by water and the Word.
From heav'n he came and taught us
what perfect love can be;
through life and death he sought us,
and rose to set us free.

The church in ev'ry nation
is one through all the earth;
our charter of salvation,
one God, one faith, one birth;
one name together blessing,
one holy food we share,
to one hope ever pressing,
at one in work and prayer.

Still, schisms, tribulation,
and hatred fuel our war;
we wait the consummation
of peace forevermore.
The saints their watch are keeping;

their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
shall be the morn of song.

Yet we on earth have union
with God, the Three in One,
and mystic, sweet communion
with those whose rest is won.
Oh, happy ones and holy!
God, give us grace that we,
like them, the meek and lowly,
may live eternally.

Benediction and Grace

As we go from here may we go as a people wracked by temptations, yet
focussed on growing in relationship with

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the Love of God,
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.