

The Gospel of Luke | Luke 4.9-13 | March 24, 2018

**Voices in the Story**

- We look today at the third temptation Jesus faces out in the wilderness.
- So far in St. Luke's story we've heard a number of voices, but all of them in a way singing harmoniously, *singing in tune* together and singing the same tune. But now we hear another voice, not of the prophet John sensibly turning us toward God and away from danger; not the joyful voice of an affectionate Father speaking *to* Jesus' and *through* Jesus to us today. We hear now instead a voice of disbelief and delusion, whispering half-truths in half-light. A voice out of tune with the other voices.

**The First Choice**

- So, Jesus is out in the desert in prayer and solitude and another voice comes calling. Every now and then we encounter the kind of thinking that says: *you've got to look out for number one, because no one else will.*
  - And that's the same sort of thing Jesus hears in the first temptation: "If you really are important," the voice whispers "if you really are God's special one, why not drum-up some bread for yourself? Surely God doesn't want you to go without. Think of your reputation; think of God's reputation."
  - But Jesus won't use power or accessible resources to do himself favours. In fact, he seems always to do the opposite. He has no problem making or multiplying bread, but he'll do so later out of *compassion* for hungry crowds, not out of anxious or proud independence.
  - So, Jesus will leave himself in God's hands. He refuses to begin his public life by trying to sustain himself. In other words, his response to the first temptation is, *"my life won't be defined by looking out for number one. I'm defined instead by my dependence on, my trust in, someone other than myself."*
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- (So where the first humans falter, where Israel on the other side of the parted sea falters, Jesus doesn't. He's stayed in tune with God.)
- And Jesus' response draws out some good questions. For example, questions about what a Christian economic world view might be, or how we think about and relate to or use our own resources or power.
- Are we as Christians confident that needn't live with an attitude to always *look out for number one*? Should a Christian hold back, hoarding time, energy, finances, love, bending an ear to the whispers that say *there's never going to be enough to go around*?
- Does a Christian believe that in the end we're *not in our own hands* and trust God who shows us a new way (as Karen Reed shared) not of scarcity but abundance, openhandedness to God and neighbour, and let that play out in real life?
- One of our values at LWC is generosity: We want to be generous, because we know that Jesus is generous. And our generosity is not only about the recipients it benefits, it's about us. It's a sign of our trust, our belief, that *someone else is looking out for us all*. We're saying, "My life is not defined by the delusion I am my own sustainer, but by a dependence on the God I'm getting to know through Jesus, and by the generosity he pours through my life to others."

## **The Second Choice**

- If the first temptation about food is subtle, the second is less so. It's about power.
- Similar to the temptation about stones and bread, it's another choice *about only ever doing himself favours*. To *reach and grab* for influence and power as evil reaches and grabs. It starts with bread and before you know it we're on to questions about world domination.
- It's the temptation to be selfish and leads to enslavement to evil and violence. That's where all selfishness leads us – into a kind of enslavement. We think we're making ourselves free, giving ourselves power, but we end up instead a

slave to that unquenchable thirst for control. Becoming a slave to evil starts with the deceptively subtle selfishness. (example violence in New Zealand Mosque)

- So, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy again, “*You must worship the Lord your God and serve him only.*”
- In that moment he doesn’t reach, he doesn’t grab or dominate. As St. Paul writes in Philippians “Christ adopts a humble posture.” (Philippians 2.7)
- Jesus takes the first steps in the right direction, not to displace power through asserting himself, not to reach or grab, or supplant but to serve his Father. And in doing so he’ll show us what God’s really like, and what God’s power is really like, and it’s not what we expect.
- Tied up for us as Christians in the scenes of Jesus’ temptation are these questions of control and power: Which voice will we listen to when faced with our own choices? Will we listen to the seductive voice, suggesting we *supplant rather than serve*? Will we end up singing along with that catchy tune about *only ever looking out for number*, and where does that road lead us in the end?
- Or will we listen to what is often a quieter voice – God’s voice – not shouting us down or typing all caps. Will we choose to *serve a God who serves and* follow that lead into generosity and solidarity with those around us?

### **The Third Choice**

- The first two temptations Jesus faces are about orienting his life around only ever doing himself favours. The third temptation is about *will bending*.
- “Make these stones do what you want” we hear in the first temptation; “Make these people do what you want, take things by force” we hear in the second. And in the third temptation the voice goes a step further, “Make God do what you want.”
- In many ways it’s the most outlandish of three temptations. This idea that Jesus would aim at suicide unless God intervened to prove that he cared. And the voice even tosses in some scripture to make it sound a little more reasonable. “If he’s

really looking out for you – and it says right here that he does – then make him prove it. Make God sing your tune, and if he doesn't then he must not care.”

- *What's being suggested to Jesus is not to mistrust God, but in fact to trust God, only on his own terms. To trust God, but trust him with conditions.*
- It sounds ridiculous in that language, trying to make God do what you want in a kind of lab experiment. But is it all that ridiculous, or is it at least a little familiar?
- We each face this question every day. To trust God, or to trust God with conditions, or on our own terms. In the dead of night, anxious about our health, our families, our futures, our finances.
- Jesus once again says, “no”. He quotes Deuteronomy again, which itself cites a story of Israel's lack of trust in God when they were in a tight spot, and in this final flourish he doesn't throw himself off the top of the Temple, he hurls himself into God's hands in an even deeper trust exercise.
- He says, “I'm not my own sustainer. I've come to serve not to be served. And I'm going to trust God on God's terms, full stop.”
- And then the episode concludes. He emerges from the desert and his course is set. He's going to work out what trusting God looks like – right up to and through the cross – and the world will change forever, because of his unparalleled depth of trust.
- Whenever I think about trusting God I'm always reminded of scuba diving. You descend into a strange, wonderful, at times troubling world. You sometimes you don't feel as though you belong and it takes some real getting used to. You have to trust this new way of breathing. You have to learn to breathe in a new way.
- Trusting God isn't always easy. Our maturity, our growing up in God, has to do with whether or not our trust will deepen or level out.
- And that deepening doesn't happen overnight. But every day we are faced with the choice to stay shallow or to sink deeper into the love and mystery of God; to trust and breathe deeply.
- So as we conclude these three weeks in this passage, talking about *resources, power and trust*, perhaps we can ask some questions.

- Where can we trust God without conditions, or where can we trust God on God's terms and not our own? In what ways can we put ourselves entirely into God's hands? What does sinking a little deeper in trust look like? Giving: future, families, finances.
- Trusting God starts with looking at Jesus, the person who shows us what God's like: compassionate, self-giving, patient, kind - that's a God to keep trusting.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Having looked at the three temptations Jesus faces in the wilderness, what has stood out to you? What have you learned or been inspired/challenged by?
- Share a time you or someone you know really had to learn to trust God?
- What's good about trusting God? What's challenging? Why is it hard sometimes for us to trust God?
- What about God is trustworthy?