

What is your temptation? What is your biggest weakness? Now, the problem is in Lent, is that Lent doesn't work if we aren't honest with ourselves. You know, like at job interviews? 'What is your biggest weakness' Oh.....My biggest weakness?? Probably that I work too hard. Or I expect too high standard from myself.' You know, those false sins or weaknesses. We are invited now into a season where we genuinely take a good hard look at ourselves warts and all in a loving way and try to better ourselves. Trying to remove some of the inner stumbling blocks that stop us from being the person that God calls us to be. Lent is about putting down at least some of the things that are causing us to move away from God and picking up things that bring us closer. Often when we think of temptation – it is easy to go straight away to the big 3. Sex, Money and Power. But it is a lot more subtle than that. I am not saying that we are not tempted by sex, money and power – but to focus on them leaves us poorer – when there is so much richness to be had if we are honest.

As soon as Jesus is Baptised – he starts facing temptations. Which echoes the Christian experience and even the human experience. We face temptations every day. From the moment we are Baptised we face so many temptations and probably give in to a fair few – especially the more subtle ones or the ones that we feel particularly righteous about. Like righteous anger or hard heartening bitterness at disappointment. These are the some of the hardest ones to tackle because we feel we have earned the right to give into these sins.

In our gospel today we have a scene between Jesus and the Devil (diabolos) echoes the garden of Eden where Adam and Eve succumb to temptation and changes our relationship with God forever because humanity starts giving into the things that take us away from God, things that causes hurt and division changes our

relationship with God. Each temptation is telling us something important about our relationship with God and how we should live in the world.

Jesus is tempted while hungry to turn the stone into bread. Instead he said no – quoting Deuteronomy 8.3. Man does not live by bread alone but from every word that comes from the mouth of God. This is manna in the desert people! Jesus is hungry – he spent 40 days in the desert wandering – sound familiar? Hungry people wandering in the desert for 40 something – days? Years? Manna is what feeds them – the food sent from God. The devil is saying ‘Hey – if you really are the Son of God – well *prove it*. There is also a hidden temptation that frames all of the challenges that Jesus faces – to prove to the world that he is what he says he is. The temptation to prove your self worth is not a temptation that has disappeared in antiquity! Yet Jesus still did a similar act on his own terms – as a blessing to others rather than something to gratify himself. He fed the 5000 on bread with miraculous abundance. We are shown a God that will nourish us – even in a barren wasteland, or when there doesn’t appear enough to go around. Never fear, never be tempted to believe that you are abandoned. Jesus is the bread of life and we have been shown that God gives with abundance.

Jesus is then tempted by the devil offering him all of the Kingdoms in the world. He says they are his. It is interesting to note that the writer doesn’t correct this. According to the writer of Luke – the devil does really own everything that has been built on corruption, hierarchy and division, on those who seek power and will dominate and destroy others to get it. Where the hungry, poor, sick and marginalised walk the street and are ignored and treated with disregard. This is not the work of God in the world – it is the work of something else. The devil offers Jesus all of this – all of the Kingdoms built from the oppression of others – in

exchange for his worship. Jesus answers by quoting Deuteronomy 6.13 ‘worship the Lord your God and only serve him.’ Like the bread, Jesus really is a King already, but his Kingdom is built of love, mercy, humility and compassion. This is the Kingdom that we are to inherit by being makers of peace, humble and meek. Not a great Kingdom of oppressive of power – God’s Kingdom is not one of force and authoritarian power – it is not coercive.

The last temptation was when the devil uses scripture on him. Jesus keeps responding with scripture – it’s almost like the devil is saying ‘Fine, I know how to play this game!’ Psalm 91:11 “For he will command his angels concerning you to protect you in every way.’ Ha!! Finally the devil understands that this is a game of quoting scripture! Maybe he will win this time – after all he got in with the scripture first! Come on Jesus! Prove that you are no chicken! Deuteronomy 6.16 ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ Have you ever put God to the test? I have heard people talk about prayers not being answered to now they have lost their faith, or maybe the demand of a sign in order to do what you know is the right thing? – the temptation to be special because God has uniquely looked after you – in some way – this makes us feel in control and even in control of God. Oddly too, Jesus, like the bread and Kingdoms, Jesus really does give his life up for us – in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus asks for the cup to be taken from him – because he knows he is to die. Our God is a God of steadfast love and self sacrifice – even to the cross.

So what are we tempted by? Sex, money, power, specialness, affiliation? What about what we are tempted not to do? When we are tempted not to stand up in the face of injustice? The temptation to be a bystander, a wall flower. We have all heard the quote ‘All it takes for evil to win is for good people to do nothing.’ Only

we can know the matters of our own heart. Our own true pit falls. The fears of abandonment that causes us to control others, the bitterness harboured in our heart from betrayals, the anger that twists us because life isn't what it was supposed to be. What is it for you? This Lent we are asked to truly think about what is stopping us from being the people that God calls us to be and take up the example of Christ instead. To be people of steadfast love, kindness, mercy.

We are shown in the Gospel that in spite of the trials God is with us every step of the way – even when we feel alone and vulnerable. We are shown a God of abundant nourishment, a God who is the King of mercy, humility and peace, a God who is faithful – even to death and a God who is outspoken on matters of injustice. A God who is inviting us everyday to take the faith of Christ that we are offered. With this – we can face any temptation.