

Satan's Easy Way

21st February 2010

Reading:

Luke 4:1-13

As we enter this time of Lent, O God, help us to use the forty days of Lent to reflect on who we are and how you would have us serve others in your name. As your Son Jesus withstood temptations in the desert, help us to withstand our temptations in our deserts. May your Holy Spirit open our eyes and empower us to your will. In the name of Christ Jesus our Lord we pray. AMEN

Now I'm a wee bit nervous this morning because I'm going to take a big risk – because I want to lead us all into temptation – and to help I've brought Satan along this morning to church. Come on up – not type casting! Let's look at him. A perfectly ordinary, reasonable character. On the surface he's going to ask reasonable things of us. He's not crude in requests. A fairly smooth character. Seeking only to help us out. Or so he says.

Let's examine his style this morning by way of three conversations Jesus had with him...

Devil: If you're God's Son – I mean if you really are the Son of God – you can have anything in the world.

Jesus: What are you getting at?

Devil: Hungry aren't you?

Jesus: A little – but what's that got to do with anything?

Devil: See this stone here? If you are God's Son, order this stone to turn into bread.

Jesus: Because I'm hungry? That's pretty selfish.

Devil: Not at all. You're not hurting anyone. And think of all the hungry people in the world – what you could do for them. Surely it would be more selfish to deny them the food you could so easily provide.

Jesus: What you say *does* make sense. My Father has sent me to be with the poor...

Devil: Well then, what are you waiting for?

All perfectly reasonable. Jesus is hungry. So use a bit of your power **if** you are the Son of God. Turn this stone into bread if you're hungry. And here we see how the tempter operates. When we are at our lowest, in he comes, playing on our hunger – for food, for comfort, for recognition. He says – “we shouldn't ever go hungry – so satisfy yourself now. Take care of yourself now. All perfectly reasonable. But – no mention of God. Yet Jesus is in the wilderness to come closer to his Father, to rely upon him. And here is the Tempter saying, YOU can meet your own needs without your Father.

It's an old story. The serpent in the Garden of Eden – “Eat the forbidden fruit” – you can meet your own needs. And so sin comes into the world.

And then there are the people of Israel in the desert. “Give us food for our stomachs”. But provision of food alone is not enough to keep the people of Israel from rebelling against God.

But Jesus does not fall for that. "People do not live by bread alone" he quotes from Scripture.

And today this temptation is alive and well. We can be tempted to surround ourselves with riches and wealth – nothing intrinsically wrong with that! But there is – if it's done with no mention of God. Our Aboriginal brothers and sisters know that. I've been told by more than one that they don't want welfare handouts thrown at them. "It's our spirit that is injured, that is hungry, do something about that and we won't need handouts."

The hunger (of all kinds) that exists in the world today is there as a result of sin. We could easily feed the world if we wanted to – there's enough for all. But Jesus knew that it was the sin that needed tackling – not the hunger. The sin that stops us from sharing what we have with everyone.

No, Mr Satan "People do not live by bread alone." Our God does in fact change stones into bread, but not at your instigation. And when he does – he meets all hunger

Devil: So maybe the bread wasn't such a terrific idea. I'm going to show you now how to make a hit where it really counts. Tell me what you see.

Jesus: All the kingdoms of the world. Amazing!

Devil: The wonders of modern technology.

Jesus: How did you do it?

Devil: Let's not waste time on the technical details. What really matters is this: I will give you all this power and all this wealth. It's been handed over to me, and I can give it to anyone I choose. It will all be yours if you worship me. Think of the good you could do!

Jesus: I'd have to worship you, you say?

Devil: Surely that's a small enough sacrifice to make for the sake of the whole world.

Jesus: It *is* a tempting offer.

Devil: Tempting? I'd say irresistible!

Here's another old, old story. Use of power to bring happiness to the world. It is tempting. All we need to do is to order people to do what we want.

If we can control the government, if we can make the laws, then we can make the world a great place. We can use our power to see that the peoples of the world are fed. But note – No mention of God. Indeed, Satan is bold enough to say that all the glory and authority of the world's kingdom has been handed over to him. And perhaps that's a clue as to where political solutions, without God, come from. Why ultimately they fail. Without God that sort of power leads to corruption and death.

Some religious zealots have sought to use that power in God's name. So many times in the church's history people have been baptised with a sword at their back. The rise of religious fundamentalism all over the world gives us some idea of what happens when humans seek to use the power of God in political ways.

This temptation is around every time we, as Christians, try to flex our muscles in the political sphere. Because in the end, God's power is not political power. It's the sort of power that leads to crucifixion. Bringing people into the kingdom of god is not done by laws – by forcing people to live in a certain way. It's done the way Jesus did it. Through a life lived obedient to

God. The power of God is in his powerlessness. As Christians we can seek power but we are told that our way is the way of the Cross.

So Mr. Satan, our victory will be won on Christ's terms, not yours. Forcing people to God's way may be tempting, Mr. Satan, but it is not god's way. His way is freedom....

Jesus: What, you still here?

Devil: Jesus, I owe you an apology. I shouldn't have insulted you with such worldly offers. I should have realised that food production and political power weren't in your line. Let me show you something completely different...

Jesus: Where are you taking me?

Devil: Three guesses.

Jesus: We're on the top of the temple!

Devil: Got it in one! If you are God's Son, throw yourself down from here. You know what the scripture says: "God will order his angels to take good care of you". It also says, "They will hold you up with their hands so that not even your feet will be hurt on the stones". There's absolutely no risk, and you can imagine the effect such a miracle will have on the people.

Jesus: They do get a kick out of signs and wonders...

Devil: Believe me, there'll be such a turning back to God that you'll wonder why you hesitated so long! *Living Faith – the Way of Christ Youth*

This last temptation of Satan is the most insidious, the most seductive. He takes Jesus to the Temple – the then centre of religion. Religion is the answer says Satan. That will bring people to God. Religious shows. Miracles. People will see and will follow.

But Jesus knows his Scriptures. He knows humankind. The people of Israel had had miracles enough and nothing was changed. People do get a kick out of signs and wonders. but they are spectators, looking at a spectacle. But Jesus came so that we might be shown how to come back to God. God, through Jesus Christ means us to be the spectacle. The miracles don't come about through showy religion. It happens within each of us.

Why did God send his Son into the world? So that we could be saved by angels in a show? No! The only miracle worth anything is his resurrection, and that occurs quietly, one Sunday morning with no witnesses at first. And then the Risen Christ meets with lowly people, first in a garden, then in a locked upper room, and then in Galilee, a remote backwater. Nothing showy or spectacular about that.

But this is the sign, this is the wonder that Jesus came to do. and it is the same sign, the same wonder that God wants in each of our lives. For us to be raised with Christ.

So, Mr Satan, as we gather here at the beginning of Lent, 40 days for our preparation, don't come to us with your easy solutions to save the world. Our way is the way of the Cross, and it leads to Calvary, and then to an empty garden tomb. So Satan begone! It is Jesus the Christ that we follow – not you.

And so Satan is gone and we are left with John ..

Rev Tony Duncan
21st February 2010
pilgrim.tony@tassie.net.au