

LENT NEWSLETTER

JESUS STRUGGLED WITH TEMPTATION



Jesus struggled with faithfulness. Temptation was the troublesome companion on his journey.

From time to time we meet sincere Christian people who are shocked that they are having a hard time with temptations. They thought that once they had committed their life to following Jesus then these evil inclinations would disappear.

In the life and mission of Jesus we know that he too struggled with great temptations. The struggles were between relying

on his own strength and ingenuity or relying on the power of God.

Could he and would he live trusting that God would lead him and give him the strength he needed to carry out his life's work. Would his mission be based on his own ingenuity or would it be the work of God?

This bulletin is meant to help us walk with the temptations that we struggle with in our faithfulness to God's call to us.



HOW TO USE THIS BULLETIN

This is the first Sunday of Lent. Each year we are brought into the struggles of Jesus. The temptations were very real and accompanied him all his life.

What can we learn from the struggles of Jesus?

Jesus learnt to be faithful. It did not drop out of the sky automatically. His fidelity to God the Father came with a high price tag.

Now, no one should be surprised that we too do not have it 'all made.' We too struggle and fall off the path of discipleship from time to time.

Better that we have women and men who are struggling, who fail from time to time, so that they can know how much they need the power of God. They read within their own weakness their hunger for God.

As you work through this bulletin bring your own struggles, and your own frustrations at your own failures, to the Lord. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you the guidance and courage to turn toward God with your whole heart and soul.

On the first Sunday of Lent the Church has traditionally focused upon Jesus' temptations in the wilderness. Here Jesus ponders the different paths that he might take in his ministry, knowing that the only path which he will tread will lead him to Jerusalem, to the cross and to suffering. Here Jesus stands at the threshold of his ministry; Jesus himself is on the edge of his pain.

This story is traditionally seen as a preparation for the ministry that was to lie ahead, but it also looks firmly towards the cross and the resurrection. Jesus eschews the path offered by Satan and embraces what, in worldly terms, is weak and illogical.

In his great novel *The Brothers Karamazov* the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky includes a parable where Jesus, who has returned to earth, is confronted by the Grand Inquisitor, who tells Jesus that he made the wrong choices when he was in the desert - he ought to have turned the stones into bread, he should have thrown himself off the pinnacle of the temple and he should have taken the opportunity to be king of all the nations of the earth. The choices were wrong because he had misunderstood human nature - human beings are not able to handle the freedom which he gave them.

Some years prior to his writing this novel, Dostoevsky famously said: "If someone were to prove

to me that Christ was outside the truth, and it was really the case that the truth lay outside Christ, then I should choose to stay with Christ rather than with the truth."

In this Lenten season we are invited to travel a path with Christ that seems to the world illogical, weak and foolish. We step outside of the world's 'truth' into the possibilities of life in Christ. As we travel we will encounter some of the people on the edge of Christ's pain. And we are invited to ponder our own responses, on the edge of His pain.

"I simply argue that the cross be raised again at the centre of the market place as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town garbage heap; at a crossroads so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew and in Latin and in Greek (or should we say in English, in Bantu and in Afrikaans?) at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse and soldiers gamble. Because that is where he died. And that is what he died about. And that is where churchmen should be and what churchmanship should be about."

George F. MacLeod

This originally appeared in the BBC radio - 2007

A Prayer for the Journey

God, as we journey, help us not to get lost.

Help us not to wander off the road.

Help us to remember that your Spirit is guiding us.

Help us to keep our eyes on the prize.

God, may we travel with our eyes open.

Free us from all indoctrination.

Free us from all of the pressures of our culture.

Free us from our fear of the truth.

God, may we not travel alone.

May the Spirit always walk with us.

May we walk with the poor and those most in need.

May we walk in community and carry one another.

God, help us now and forever. Amen.





Meditation on the Temptations of Jesus

It is difficult to put ourselves into the shoes of the Biblical characters - and most of all of Jesus himself. Each week there is a short monologue whose purpose is to help us do just that - to think about the character of the person and relate that person to our own time, culture and place.

It has been so liberating... this stay in the wilderness. In spite of all the temptations overcome, I have found freedom. Freedom for my ministry. I have had to consider what I should leave behind. But first remember that freedom from... is freedom for - it is doing what is contrary to natural expectations. The evil one expected me to accept the offer of power and status. But prayer has given me clarity. We don't pray to change God, we pray to change ourselves. Every day and every time we stop and enter into prayer we set about changing ourselves - what have I done, what ought I to do?

The world of power and status has been left behind and I'm seeing beyond judgment right

through to forgiveness. I know where this path leads and I fear for those of my family and friends who will be damaged by it.

I must remain focused on my ministry in the service of my Father. Everything else has been stripped away... All that is left is trust. I know that all eyes will be fixed on me. There are so many expectations. Abba, it is not what I do that counts most, it is how I trust. When all of the distractions and attachments are taken away, it's not what you do or don't do, it's about trust and intention, why you do it. Here in the wilderness is a purifying of all that is unimportant. Being here is living as though an encounter with God is unavoidable. And it is.

But soon I must move on, move on to the way of the cross. I must remember that the God-centered life has to be as much a journey towards perfection as it is a desire for salvation. My ministry is about restoring every person, all creation, to the original perfect state of the Father's intention, but first we must endure much together.

Regardless of where we live or what we do, the wilderness has to be about a vocation of creativity and love. It can never be about blind obedience to a duty which leads in the end to thirst and emptiness. On the road I will meet my heavenly Father in many people. I hope I can heal

many and bring joy. You never know where Grace is...

Questions for Discussion

Lent is traditionally a time of fasting and inward reflection. How are you planning to navigate your journey through this Lenten time?

Lent is also a time when we try to think more deeply about our faith and how we live it: Reflecting on our Gospel reading, what are the implications for our faith of following Christ and not the world?

Have you ever been in a wilderness? What kind of vulnerabilities emerged when you were there?

What kind of vulnerabilities might Jesus have experienced?





THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS.
-Lucien Diess

Lord Jesus, you told us:
"Not on bread alone is man to live but on every utterance that comes from the mouth of God,"
We pray to you:
Help us during this season of Lent
To live more abundantly by your Word.
Help us also not to give into the temptation
Of expecting a miracle to give us free bread when we can earn it by our work.

All: Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil!

Then it was said to you:
"He will bid his angels take care of you;
with their hands they will support you that you may never stumble on a stone."
We pray to you,
Help us never to lack confidence in your protection.
Help us also not to fall into the temptation

Of asking for the miraculous help of angels
When we ourselves can move the stones from the road.

All: Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil!

Jesus also you told us:
You shall do homage to the Lord your God;
him alone shall you adore."
We pray to you:
"Remove from our hearts the attraction of idols,
because you alone are our Lord and Master.
Help us also, in our adoration of you, not to fall into the temptation, of forgetting to serve and help our brothers and sisters.

All: Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil!

Lord Jesus,
You have become like one of us,
You have suffered the test of temptation,
We pray to you:
Be our merciful and faithful high priest,
Come to the aid of those who fall,
And deliver us from evil!

**LEAD US FROM THE
DEPTH OF THIS
WILDERNESS**

*Liberating God
Lead us into the depths of
your wilderness
Free us from everything that
distracts from your way
Free us for life with you in
this wilderness place
Free us to live and love and
become fully what you want
us to be
Fix our eyes on your path
Restoring every person
Restoring all creation
Serving others as you served
us*

