

WELCOME 1 March 2020 – 1 Lent '20 A

DEEP CYCLE: DEEP THREAT

Matthew 4:1-11

Good morning & Welcome to Living Water Fellowship! Special welcome to our visitors & guests...It is wonderful you're all here! Please stay for morning tea after worship so we get to know each other better.

The big health news in my mind this week wasn't the latest tracking or speculation on the Coronavirus...but the uncertainties surrounding the long term health effects of the bushfires...How being exposed day in/day out to the thick soup of smoke & hot toxic fumes will effect firefighters & thousands of others who lived every day blanketed by the ash filled air.

Just like the many who were exposed to airborne asbestos & had no idea they were in danger or the military personnel who lived in a wartime environment dripping with Agent Orange...We just don't know what sorts of outcomes the smoke, ash, & fumes will produce. We are justly concerned about those sorts of deep threats to health & welfare.

The Bible tells us we face another more pressing & eternally more dangerous Deep Threat...**AND** it **ALREADY** lives in our hearts - hearts that were created in love by God, as places where his love could live & from which we were to love God with all we are in response. That deep threat is called "sin." We know it better as – self – the simple decision that we know better...than God, than anyone how we should live. That we are the boss of us...and each of us faces that temptation daily.

This deep threat of temptation always entices us to shift our allegiance, trust & confidence away from God to some immediately available substitute that promises more now...& the results of sin are always the same - a heart burdened by guilt & filled with pain, or so hardened by sin that it refuses to acknowledge the brokenness that exists or the pain that follows.

But today, as Jesus stands victorious, having driven back the Tempter, we too, in Him, can stand having defeated these deep threats & emerge from every temptation with a clear sense of identity, & with a purpose, power & authority to engage the world more prepared to declare Christ's victory & offer his triumph to others.

We'll explore and experience that together today.

Let's pray & then we'll get stuck into it!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Father in these moments speak into our hearts...No...don't just talk to us....shout over us your love & delight. Assure us again that we are yours & no power can snatch us from your hand. Live through us with such boldness that every trick of the tempter fails & many around us are drawn into your arms of eternal love. Through Jesus Christ...Amen.

1 Lent '20 A - DEEP CYCLE: DEEP THREAT

FAITH CHAT:

1. Please share one place where you experienced God's presence this week.
2. When do you feel you are most "temptable"? Why is that?

I'm curious: Do any of you "give up" something for Lent? Why?/not? I don't any more... although there was a time when I always tried. Key word...tried. My Lenten denials & observances were a catalogue of failed commitments & over-zealous goals. Some years ago I quit asking folks to "give something up" & instead "do something new" – Bible reading-service-prayer disciplines-giving increases...that sort of thing. But the people I've always trusted & who serve as accountability/reality check for me all said the problem they had was that "just say no/don't/do" always resulted in them/me maybe being compliant but not different. We could all for a time behave, & not necessarily be transformed...what we all wanted was transformation & we always reverted/fell back to the old habits...

The problem is that that sort of discipline/self-denial always puts sin/temptation "out here" – external to – outside of me...chocolate, beer, TV, shopping, exercise...sin & temptation then become sort of a spiritual test of strength or faith...(Little engine that Could...I think I can I think I can I think I can) While there is some truth there, it turns the good news of the kingdom (where no scores are kept & no prizes for super-good deeds) into the bad news of keeping track of successes/failures against various temptings. Who needs that? Who needs Santa's naughty/nice list when the Bible is clear the problem is "in here?" *The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, & desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? – Jer 17:9*

The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, & that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. – Gen 6:5

Jesus said, "It is what comes from inside that defiles you. For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, & foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you." – Mk 7:20-23

In that context we find Jesus in the wilderness "*tempted there by the devil.*" Now we have to get clear to see how *THAT* transforms *THIS*...1st Jesus is not there by accident or in agony. Mt, Mk & Lk all record this account of Jesus going toe-toe w/ the evil one **AND** they all recount it in the same way (not w/ the same details). **BIBLES** Mt 4...turn back to Mt 3:13-17...What's happening? Baptism...4:1-11 Temptation. 4:12 – Ministry. The 3 gospels most closely associated w/ Jesus' life/ministry Mt/Mk/Lk – synoptic gospels – synopsis of his life – his biography all note that pattern Baptism-Temptation-Mission. All 3 ALSO note that Jesus emerges from his baptism under the power of 2 things: *After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened & he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove & settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son who brings me great joy"* Holy Spirit's Power **AND** the Father's acclamation...That's what baptism is for Jesus **AND**. **FOR**. **YOU**. Power of the Spirit & the Father's claim upon you & delight in you. Baptism is **NOT** my public profession of my private faith. Baptism **IS** the Father's public declaration of how he has felt about me since before time began. It **IS** his gift to me of the Holy Spirit to save/recreate me in Jesus' image. now that's Mt 3...

But then an odd thing happens. Mt 4:1: *Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil.* Mk says the Spirit "*drove/compelled*" Jesus into the wilderness...Lk says Jesus was "*full of the Holy Spirit...& was led...*" Jesus is not there by accident. He is there because confronting the power of the enemy was his true work: "*The Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil.*" – 1 Jn 3:8

For we are not fighting against flesh & blood enemies, but against evil rulers & authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, & against evil spirits in the heavenly places. – Eph 6:12 Jesus is not there by accident **NOR** is he in agony. He turns aside the evil one at every moment. He's not sweating it out muscling up his strength to say "I think I can I think I can - No." Jesus simply lives from the 2 things he already has... Holy Spirit's Power **AND** the Father's acclamation His relationship with the Father & their unity in the Spirit were his before he went to the Jordan, before he faced the tempter, before he offered his 1st sermon/healing/exorcism/miracle. Whether Jesus said yes/no didn't determine his sonship, his belovedness, or that God delighted in him. They were reality. Jesus could neither earn them nor lose them. Neither can we. This relationship God has with Jesus is the same relationship God initiates with each one of us through our baptism into that Son's death/rez. In Jesus Christ crucified/risen/ruling each of us is a son/daughter whom God loves whom God dearly loves & in whom God delights. *My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me & gave himself for me. – Gal 2:20* The life I live now I live under Holy Spirit's Power **AND** the Father's acclamation...I live in Christ so I live in the power of every blessing he pours out...Everything of his is mine. That's true of each of us... And that's cool...but it gets better.

2nd Because that's means we live with unimaginable power at work in us...when you & I live from Holy Spirit's Power **AND** the Father's acclamation...from that good news firmly planted in that promise of God to forever be with us & for us...then in every temptation satan must flee because Jesus has defeated sin/power of evil & they no longer have a claim on our hearts...satan must flee because in his death Jesus took sin/evil to death & by his rising gave us in return forgiveness, life & salvation & his relationship with the Father & now stands ruling over all things with hell crushed under his feet. We now live under the promises of the risen Jesus to thwart the plans & schemes of the tempter. *But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory... because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world 1 Jn 4:4* we live with unimaginable power at work in us - the unrestrained power of the risen Jesus Christ. And that's cool...but it gets better.

3rd Whatever testing, tempting or trial we endure is meant to transform us for mission. Mt/Mk/Lk all then note immediately after Jesus pushes back the tempter he emerges from the wilderness engaged in proclaiming the arrival of God's kingdom in his presence. *From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins & turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near (at hand)."* – Mt 4:17 From then on...healings, exorcisms, miracles of every kind...in word & deed the good news of God's promised love & forgiveness & restoration & recreation flows from Jesus. The Holy Spirit's power became evident & obvious in his life in a new way. Jesus went into the desert full of the Spirit, & he came out of the desert in the power of the Spirit. Both before & after, he was fully possessed by the Spirit & fully led by the Spirit, but having defeated the devil, the Spirit's power became very pronounced in his life.

Jesus emerged from his time of testing with power & authority to engage the world. The purifying work that God does in us as individuals is a part of something much bigger - the renewal of all things! We are made to be like Jesus to do what Jesus did & participate in his work in the world. Being formed in the image of Christ implies that we also participate in the Father's mission to make all things new. Lent & any discipline we take up or sin we put down should be about more than making us better, more spiritual people. Lent & any discipline we take up or sin we put down should cause us to comprehend that we are sent just like Jesus was sent...that we ourselves are bearers of his image & workers of his kingdom who live his presence in all we are & do...and our lives can be our best witness to the transforming power of the Father at work in this world.

You've heard me say before...Every temptation is the same. Every one. All the same. It doesn't matter if we give in to our anger, lose our patience, break a promise, compromise our values, trade in our integrity, hide like cowards instead of standing up for what we believe...hand ourselves over to the world's values appetite, approval, ambition...acquire achieve accumulate...command control conquer... They're all the same. They all seek to corrode our confidence that what God has given is enough – that what God has promised will be sufficient – that God is trustworthy & sufficient & more importantly that God is who he says he is & we are who he says we are...loved, dearly loved, children in whom the Father delights.

And having stood his ground under Holy Spirit's Power **AND** the Father's acclamation through the wilderness of temptation, Jesus steps forward to fulfill the Father's will that all things would be reconciled to him through Christ's life/death/rez. In that...in your time of testing trial or tempting... you like Jesus live under the Spirit's presence & power...you are not alone. You live with the Father's acclamation...you have nothing to prove & no prize to lose. You will not be there forever but can turn aside the evil one – push back the darkness – stand in triumph over the tempter offering to those around you the sure hope of Christ's victory & the Father's delight & the Spirit's power.

Let us pray...**Get out of here Satan! I belong to Jesus Christ who has already delivered me from your tricks and traps.**

Lord Jesus, bring the fullness of your grace and strength alive in me today. Cause my heart to cling to you above all else, and trust you in every circumstance. In the power of your Spirit send me as you were sent to proclaim the arrival of your kingdom of grace and the victory of your love and life over every evil. I pray right now for... (silent prayer for those living distant from God's grace) In your name we pray... Amen