

WELCOME 21st February 2021 – 1st Sunday in Lent '21 B

Matthew 4:1-11

Welcome! It's great to be together again. Delighted you are here.

As has become our custom there are Group Study & Discussion resources in your hands. *So that worship is an all week long experience & as God leads you into the fullness of His word & his work in your lives & then introduces you to someone this week who needs to hear the good news from you.* We are still doing those things we need to maintain a level of safety: Hand sanitizer. **Masks.** Sign in. No morning tea just yet. Offering. Communion.

As we move into this week...They're on our computers...In our cars...on our wrists. Mechanics, Drs, Coaches & Teachers use 'em daily. Diagnostic tools that provide insight, find a weakness or vulnerability. Highlight a fault. Aid in understanding. Pinpoint an area that needs repair...or strengthening.

Oddly enough...Temptation provides a similar diagnosis. It highlights an emptiness, exposes vulnerabilities, reveals faults, gives insight into those deep places in our souls that need repair or strength.

Temptation is a tool designed by the devil but used by God to remind us of the truth & the certainty of who we are - a precious child in whom the Father delights & in His presence we have nothing to prove, nothing to hide & nothing to fear.

In the face of all that would lead us away from him or causes us to distrust his goodness & love, God comes in our tempted moments...to satisfy, fill, & repair all that is broken, empty, & weak...to take us deeper into his presence & power so that **in Christ** we receive less appetite & more fulfilment...eternally.

We'll explore & experience that together. Let's pray...then we'll get stuck into it.

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

Faithful God, you draw near to us in our joy & in our grief, in our hope & in our gloom. When we are bowed down, you raise us anew. We turn to you now in search of your healing touch. God of compassionate love, move among us this hour. Open our eyes, dispel our fears, & bring us into the abundant life you offer. We pray this in the name of the Risen One, who raises the dead...Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Let's sing & then we'll hear God's Word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. What's your favourite 'go to' snack? How "fulfilling" is it?
2. Right now, on a scale of 1-10: 1 = absolutely desperate & 10 = no appetite at all
Rate your "hunger" for God? Why?

1 Lent – '21 B – ADDITION BY SUBTRACTION: LESS APPETITE – MORE FULFILLMENT

I'm going to start with a 3rd Faith Chat...mainly because I'm curious & I also think we'll learn something...Ready? You've heard this text: temptation of Jesus narrative often...So hearing it again today must create some sort of "picture" image in your mind...So...As it was being read...as you heard it again: What did you see? How did the action unfold in your mind's eye?

I ask that question & I'm fascinated by your reflections because my sense is & y'all bore it out to a degree...many of us read *For forty days & forty nights he (Jesus) fasted & became very hungry* & the image in our minds is **us** - what **we'd** be like after 40 days/nights of fasting. We read about Jesus & think, Man! I'd be dead by then or so worn down & bedraggled I wouldn't know ↑ from ↓ There's truth to that...To go w/o food causes us to live off of our reserves & burn off whatever is here for our body to use & after a while we get run down because even for the most "well-resourced" among us, our body can live off the reserves for only so long.

But what if your "reserve" – what you lived from was: *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. Then a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."* What if **that** was **your** sustenance in every circumstance? What if **that** the presence of the Holy Spirit & the acclamation & love of the Father was **your** daily resource? You see, **that** is what precedes the encounter ^{b/t} Jesus & the tempter...that's the starting point/foundation/launch pad for everything Jesus does. There's that & then there's this...

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. The events of Jesus' life play out in just that order. Jesus emerges into the middle of John the Baptist's ministry where he is baptized & the Spirit descends marking Jesus as the One who lives as the fulfillment of *ALL* the OT promises & the Father shouts his love & delight over him. Then under the presence & power of the Spirit Jesus is led (driven) into this confrontation w/ the devil. This isn't some accidental encounter...a random meeting...or even a sneak attack ambush by satan while Jesus is at a low point. What we are seeing is part & parcel of Jesus' mission to rescue & recreate all things by his life, death & rez. This is every bit as critical a moment in Jesus' ministry as any healing – sermon – exorcism or wrangle w/ the religious bigshots.

And let's be clear...The 3 specific temptations...are ALL the same temptation.

What do I mean by that? Here we see offers of bread significance & glory – appetite approval & ambition...wealth fame & power – happiness fulfillment & status – belonging influence & security... ALL the same temptation...Each temptation invites Jesus to turn away from trust in God in a different way. Each seeks to erode & undermine Jesus' confidence in his relationship w/ God. Remember where this all started?

"This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy." 2x the tempter says "If you are all that..." & the 3rd is a blatant act of bribery. But they're all the same. Each seeks to turn Jesus away from what is unshakable: His Sonship – that which is unmistakable His unique role in the saving work of God through God's people (that's why the Spirit rests on Jesus) – that which is steadfast God's love & delight in Him. The tempter tries to take from Jesus that which is already his. ALL temptations are the same.

Temptation is not some pop quiz the Father springs on Jesus or us testing our loyalty faith & devotion. Temptation is a tool designed by the devil but used by God to remind us of the truth & the certainty of who we are - a precious child in whom the Father delights & in His presence we have nothing to prove, nothing to hide & nothing to fear. Temptation is the diagnostic tool that tells you & me where we look to find true security...where we seek to build our identity...how we think our destiny & future will unfold.

Imbedded in every temptation is the suggestion that the Father isn't up to the challenges we face...He just doesn't know how hard it is to be me...so I need to handle this one myself. He doesn't know – doesn't understand – won't see it the way I see it...Imbedded in every temptation are seeds of mistrust egging us on to fulfill the deep wants/needs at the core of our being not through our relationship w/ God but by our own ends. Every temptation is the temptation to be self-sufficient...autonomous...independent. Every temptation points to some sense of lack or inadequacy that I believe I must fill – meet – conquer...to create some superficial security on my own...through some meager substitute for the Father.

For forty days & forty nights he (Jesus) fasted & became very hungry... For what? For what did Jesus hunger? Square meal? Probably...but what else perhaps? Remember Jesus has been led here in the power of the Holy Spirit...**to be tempted by the devil...** This isn't poor poor pitiful Jesus beset by the devil when his guard is down. Jesus is fully equipped for this moment...So...Is he hungering for the 1st blow to be struck in his battle w/ the evil one...to show satan to his face that his days are numbered... to reveal to the enemy that his defeat is at hand. Don't forget that Jesus' 1st sermon is a short one: *"Repent, turn to God, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

Jesus would later declare: *God blesses those who hunger & thirst for righteousness for they will be satisfied.* Do we see in Jesus the stirrings of a hunger for his work in this world to begin as it begins by driving back the work of the tempter? You may recognize that last verse...acc to Mt not far from today's events. It's part of the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount...Jesus' 1st extended sermon. It's there too where we hear Jesus say: *"That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food & drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, & your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?"* The very thing the tempter dangled in front of Jesus...feed yourself...stand on your own 2 feet...control your own destiny...secure your own existence...Jesus now reminds us that we, who are precious to God, can trust God's grace & goodness & provision in all things.

I'll stay in the Sermon on the Mount for a bit...It comes hot on the heels of the Temptation in Mt's biography/gospel of Jesus & contains this assurance: *"Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them & rust destroys them, & where thieves break in & steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths & rust can't destroy, & thieves don't break in & steal...Seek the Kingdom of God & his righteousness above all else & he will give you everything you need."* Imbedded in every temptation is the suggestion that the Father isn't up to the challenges we face... Every temptation is the temptation to be self-sufficient...to muscle-up & seize the day for me...But over & over again Jesus points back to the Father as the source of every blessing – the giver of every necessary gift – the final fulfilment & satisfaction for every need.

*Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us **everything** else?* I want to say this so we all get it straight...God loves you more than anything. He loves you me all of us – enough to send His only beloved Son who brings God great joy into the world to take on our flesh bones blood guts & life, to suffer the same temptations & wants, to be rejected as we often feel rejected & to die as we will die, all so that we may know God is w/ us & for us forever. And if that wasn't enough...God raised Jesus from the dead to show once & for all that God's love is more powerful & more true than all the tempting lies this world & the devil can throw our way & that the life God offers is more powerful even than death.

And when this world & the devil are giving us their worst & we forget just how loved we are & just how delighted God is to call us his own & give us his Kingdom... *This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we*

do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, & we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

In the face of all that would lead us away from him or causes us to distrust his goodness & love, God comes in our tempted moments...to satisfy, fill, & repair all that is broken, empty, & weak...to take us deeper into his presence & power so that in Christ we receive less appetite & more fulfilment...eternally.

The devil threw Psalm 91 in Jesus' face as a part of the temptations...Let's us give it right back as part of Christ's victory:

**Those who live in the shelter of the Most High
will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.**

² This I declare about the LORD:

**He alone is my refuge, my place of safety;
he is my God, and I trust him...**

**The LORD says, "I will rescue those who love me.
I will protect those who trust in my name.**

**¹⁵ When they call on me, I will answer;
I will be with them in trouble.**

I will rescue and honor them.

**¹⁶ I will reward them with a long life
and give them my salvation."**

Amen