

Epworth Chapel on the Green
February 17, 2013
First Sunday in Lent
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Deuteronomy 26:1-11
Psalm 91:9-15
Romans 10:5-13
Luke 4:1-13

Our Gospel lesson today comes to us as one of the most familiar texts of the New Testament, and consequently, one of the most difficult to preach. It's the problem of familiarity. The more a text is read, the more difficult it can be to truly *hear* it.

The story shows us Jesus as he is led into the desert, where he is tempted by Satan to feed the hungry of the world, to lay claim to the kingdoms of the world, and to reveal his true identity to the world.

In his response to this situation, Jesus walks away from one kind of life in favor of another. He embodies the Gospel, and the heart of Lent, for that matter. For the heart of Lent, and of the Gospel, is *metanoia*, what we know as *repentance*. It involves a turning *from*, and a turning *toward*. Following Jesus is a constant process of orientation and reorientation, of turning away from one kind of life in favor of another.

One common way to read this text on the temptation of Jesus is to see it in terms of a "power grab." This is especially the case when Satan offers Jesus

authority over all the kingdoms of the world (vv. 5-6). But there is more to it than that.

I think that one of the key things Satan is attempting to do here with Jesus is to *sow mistrust*. Satan wants to call into question Jesus' relationship with the Father, and to play on any insecurity that may be present in the relationship.

Behind the temptation to turn stones to bread lies the attempt to sow mistrust by implicitly telling Jesus: "you may go hungry."

Behind the temptation to take authority over all the kingdoms of the world is the attempt to sow mistrust by suggesting to Jesus: "you do not have enough."

Behind the temptation to bow down and worship Satan is the attempt to sow mistrust in his relationship with the Father by telling Jesus: "how do you know God is trustworthy?"

Jesus responds in each case with Scripture. But it may be that Jesus is using Scripture not so much to *deflect* temptation, but because in Scripture he finds the words that give voice to his *trust* in the Father. *For at the heart of each reply of Jesus to Satan is Jesus' absolute trust in and dependence on God for his identity and his future.*

There is another biblical text that is not part of our readings today, but which many of us think about when the subject is temptation. I'm speaking, of course, about Genesis 3, and the story of Adam and Eve.

I believe Satan works much the same way with Adam and Eve as he does with Jesus here in Luke 4. That is, he attempts to sow mistrust in them over their relationship with God. Satan distorts the commandment of God and plays upon Adam and Eve's insecurity in order to call into question God's intentions. Satan essentially tells them: "God hasn't told you everything about the forbidden fruit. So what else has God not told you? What else is God withholding?"

The seductive power of Satan here in this scene is one where Satan *sows mistrust* in the hearts of Adam and Eve, and plays upon their insecurities in the relationship. He attempts the same strategy with Jesus, and with us.

New Testament scholar David Lose puts it this way:

There is a crucial link between trust and temptation. To the degree that we trust God for our daily needs, for a sense of purpose, for our identity as a child of God, the temptations of the world have, frankly, little appeal. But to the degree that we allow our natural insecurity to lead us to mistrust God, we are open to the possibility, appeal, and temptation of the proposition that it is all up to us, that God is not able to provide and so we'd better take matters into our own hands. (WorkingPreacher.org, February 10, 2013)

As I thought about these words this week, it occurred to me that one of the greatest temptations I face in my Christian walk is the temptation *not to trust God as I should* in various areas of my life. I am insecure about many things, and the enemy plays on my insecurities to try to erode my trust in God, and in God's promise to provide for me and to guide my life.

With the help of my acolytes, I'd like you to do something with me this morning. I'm giving to each of you a 3x5 card, and we will provide you pencils.

On one side of the card, I want you to write the word "trust" at the top. Then, I want you to write down something in your life for which you trust God and have confidence in God. It's not that you don't sometimes worry about it, but it's something that you are able to trust God for and have confidence in God about.

Now, on the other side of the card, write the word "mistrust" at the top. Here I want you to write something for which it is hard for you to trust in God at this point in your life.

Take the card with you this week. Each day this week, find a minute or two to pull the card out, and look at it. When you see the "trust" side, pause and give thanks to God for this area of your life. When you see the "mistrust" side, pause and pray over this area of your life. Ask God for grace and help. And thank God for His goodness.

As we come to the Lord's Table this morning, bring every part of you to this table. Bring the part of you that finds it easy to trust, and bring the part of you that sometimes struggles to trust. Bring all of it. As you receive the bread and the wine, receive them as promises of God's goodness and faithfulness to you. Receive them as His promise never to leave you or forsake you. Receive His peace. Then go in peace, trusting in His goodness and His mercy.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.