

### Luke 4:1-13

We have entered the season of Lent, have you given anything up? If you have you may be tempted to sneak that chocolate biscuit you promised yourself you wouldn't have until Easter or have a secret fizzy drink. Temptation is all around us, and if we examine ourselves closely, hardly a day goes by when we aren't tempted to do something we know we shouldn't. Sometimes these are big things, but more often they are small things: a cross word to someone close to us, or some sugar in our tea when the doctor has told us to cut down. Alas, even vicars know the realities of temptation!

As we begin our journey through Lent, it is fortuitous that the gospel reading this morning is Luke's account of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. This was a pivotal moment in Jesus' life: He has just been baptised and affirmed by the voice of God from heaven, and he is about to embark on his public ministry. But first he spends time alone in the wilderness, perhaps considering how his ministry might play out, what route he should take to achieve what he feels is his calling. Here, the devil meets him and tempts him in ways that we can all relate to, even a little. If saying that we should find identification with Jesus' temptations sounds strange, consider how he is tempted, because Satan's tactics in the wilderness reveal his strategy against us. Jesus is tempted in three ways: the temptation of physical needs, the temptation of power, and the temptation of pride.

Satan first tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread. Jesus had been fasting for forty days, and naturally, He was hungry. I once fasted for *one* day as part of a church prayer and fasting group. At the end of the day, I could happily have eaten anything! So poor Jesus, having fasted for 40 days must have been absolutely famished. This is the first of the devil's tests and perhaps would have been the hardest one for Jesus to resist: being hungry is a powerful motivator. The temptation here was to satisfy a legitimate need in an illegitimate way.

Jesus responds by quoting from Scripture: "Man shall not live on bread alone" he says, referencing Deuteronomy 8:3. He teaches us that that whilst we must meet our physical needs, we should also pay attention to God.

Next, Satan offers Jesus power and authority over all the kingdoms of the world, but with a catch: Jesus must bow down and worship him. The temptation here is Jesus to compromise his values for the sake of worldly power and success. Jesus may have considered how he could use all that power for good, to bring people into a relationship with God. But he was too wise for the devil, and he knew that the devil would find a way to make his best intentions into evil. Also, why should Jesus worship anything other than God? Many times, we are tempted to take shortcuts to success, sacrificing our integrity and devotion to God. Perhaps we have good intentions, however we should always remember the old saying my grandmother used to say: the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Once again, Jesus' response is clear: "Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only", again referring to Deuteronomy, this time chapter 6 verse 13. Notice that Jesus doesn't say "don't work for success" or "success is evil". Success can be a good thing and can help us feel fulfilled. But here he reminds us that true fulfilment comes for putting God in his rightful place at the top of our agendas and not compromising our values in the name of achievement.

Finally, Satan takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem and challenges Him to throw Himself down, quoting Scripture to suggest that God would protect Him. This was a test of Jesus' identity and an attempt to force God's hand. Even in this vertigo inducing position, Jesus refuses to manipulate God, once more finding inspiration in the words of Deuteronomy (6:16) "Do not put the Lord your God to the test". We, too, must be wary of prideful testing of God—seeking signs and wonders instead of walking by faith. Many of us, I'm sure, have prayed for a sign for something

from God. I certainly have. Yet doesn't this show a lack of trust in God's plan? Jesus, from this lofty vantage point, demonstrates for us that God shouldn't be tested.

Today, if you find yourself in a season of testing, remember that God is with you. Temptation is not sin; it is an opportunity to trust in God's strength. As the former archbishop of York, John Sentamu used to say: you can't stop birds from flying over your head, but you can stop them making a nest in your hair. Temptations will come, every day. We can't do anything about that, but we can control how we respond to them. We can control how far we stand firm in God's Word, rely on the Holy Spirit, and fix your eyes on Jesus.

Amen.