

## Lent 1C 2022 Sermon

*Luke 4:1-13*

*After his baptism, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"*

*Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"*

*Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,*

*'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,'  
and*

*'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"*

*Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.*

Every year, on the first Sunday in Lent, we read the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Indeed, the fact that Lent is 40 days long is precisely because it is patterned after Jesus' 40 days of temptation in the Wilderness.

Now when I think of temptation, I can't help but recall Adam and Eve being tempted by the serpent to eat the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. And, given the fact that immediately preceding today's Gospel lesson Luke traces Jesus' ancestry back to Adam, perhaps *Luke* is thinking of the temptation in the Garden of Eden as well. And what I want to suggest to you is that if we look at the temptation of Adam and Eve closely, we will see that it was largely a temptation to mistrust God. Bible scholar David Lose calls it our "original insecurity," rather than "original sin."<sup>1</sup> The serpent plays upon the insecurity of Adam and Eve in order to call into question God's trustworthiness. The story of Adam and Eve and their temptation is a mythic story of seduction based on mistrust that leads to the *de facto* dis-integration of the relationship between the two humans and God, and the relationship between humanity and the rest of creation. Mistrust leads to disconnection between human beings and God, between human beings and other human beings, and between human beings and the rest of Creation.

Today's Gospel story about Jesus' temptation in the wilderness revolves around the same dynamic as the temptation of Adam and Eve. The devil attempts to sow in Jesus mistrust of God: "*You do not have enough food,*" the devil warns the famished Jesus, "*and God cannot be trusted to provide for you. You're in this alone, so take the matter into your own hands! Turn these stones into bread!*" In each of the three instances of temptation in today's Gospel, Jesus replies with Scripture, the Jewish Bible. But, as David Lose suggests, "it's not so much that Jesus quotes Scripture to deflect temptation as it is that Jesus finds *in* Scripture the words to give voice to his trust."<sup>2</sup> Because at the heart of Jesus' reply to each of the three temptations is Jesus' absolute trust in – and dependence on – God, for his identity, his calling, his future.

Dr. Lose suggests that there is a crucial link between trust and temptation. To the degree that we *do* trust God, the temptations of the world have little power over us. But to the degree that we allow our "original insecurity" to lead us to *mistrust* God, we are open to the temptation to believe that it is all up to us and our own resources.<sup>2</sup> God is not, in the end, benevolent toward us; and so we *must* look after our own selves. The great danger is that we can go so far down the road of self-sufficiency and independence from God as to cut ourselves off from the very source of our Life, from Christ's outpouring love and spiritual sustenance. To use St. John's image – that Christ is the vine and we are the branches – we cut ourselves off from the vine when we stop trusting in God. (John 15:4-5)

Blaise Pascal, the seventeenth-century French mathematician and philosopher, spoke of the condition of being human as one of having what he called a "God-shaped hole" in our heart. Adam and Eve were tempted to solve the problem of their "original insecurity" not through their relationship with God but through eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, fruit that *in that moment* looked to them to be shaped in such a way as to fit perfectly into the hole in their heart.

Now, you have heard me say many times that in the original Greek of the New Testament, there is a verb form of the word "faith (*pisteúō*);" but, since in our English language we **don't** have a *verb* "to faith," Bible translators have to use a *different* English word when translating that Greek verb. Unfortunately, they most often translate it as "believe." But I'm convinced that a *better* translation, truer to the Biblical meaning, is "trust." To "faith in God" is to *trust* in God. Trust is critical for our relationship with God and with each other. And when trust is lacking, the temptation to "go it alone" and seek ultimate meaning and fulfillment in what the *world* has to offer – out there – that temptation is strong.

And, my friends, I fear that, in our world today, we have succumbed, more and more, to that temptation. We are experiencing, in our world today, what columnist David Brooks calls "a long-term loss of solidarity, a long-term rise in estrangement and hostility."<sup>3</sup> Brooks writes: "That basic sense of peoplehood, of belonging to a common enterprise with a shared destiny, is exactly what's lacking today. Researchers and reporters... find [increasing] levels of distrust, suspicion

and alienation... They find people who assume as a matter of course that their fellow countrymen are out to con, deceive and harm them... This ‘the only person you can trust is yourself’ mentality has a tendency to cause people to conceive of themselves as individuals and not as citizens.”<sup>3</sup> (unquote)

We tend to conceive of ourselves as disconnected from one another, and from God, since neither can be trusted.

Albert Einstein reportedly said that “the most important question facing humanity is, ‘Is the universe a friendly place?’” In other words, is God, and the universe, ultimately benevolent, and therefore trustworthy, or not?

Richard Rohr writes, “If the Trinity reveals that God is relationship itself, then the goal of the spiritual journey is to discover and move toward connectedness on ever new levels... Without connectedness and communion, we don't exist fully as our truest selves. Becoming who we really are is a matter of learning how to become more and more deeply connected. No one can possibly go to heaven alone...

“Of course, we won't become vulnerable enough to connect unless we learn to trust over and over again. ...The spiritual experience is about trusting that when you stop holding yourself, Inherent Goodness will still uphold you. Many of us call that God, but you don't have to. It is the trusting that is important. When you fall into such Primal Love, you realize that everything is foundationally okay. Unfortunately, this is often absent in our secular world today.

“Foundational love gives us hope and allows us to trust ‘what is’ as the jumping-off point toward working together for ‘what can be.’ The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus shows us what's fully possible. God will always bring yet more life and wholeness out of seeming chaos and death... ‘Faith in the resurrection is the ground on which Christians hope for a *different* future, a transition to a society less destructive, more peaceful and more whole. Living in this hope... calls [*the Church*] to live as a “contrast community” to society.”<sup>4</sup>

And that, my friends, is our calling as the Body of Christ, the Church, in this world. “The heart of the matter,” writes David Lose, “turns on how secure we are in our life and how confident we are of God’s grace. The need to control, in my experience, stems from a lack of trust – in ourselves, in those around us, and in God. The funny – or perhaps tragic – thing is, however, that the more we try to control, the more captive we are to fear and cynicism. But when we let go in confidence and trust, so much more is suddenly available to us.”<sup>5</sup>

When we let go in confidence and trust, so much more is suddenly available to us.

AMEN

- 1 David Lose, “Original Insecurity and the Power of Love,” *...in the Meantime*, Oct. 20, 2014 <https://www.davidlose.net/2014/10/ref-day-pen-20-original-insecurity/>
- 2 David Lose, “Trust and Temptation,” Dear Working Preacher blog, Feb. 10, 2013, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/trust-and-temptation>
- 3 David Brooks, “America Is Falling Apart at the Seams,” New York Times, Jan. 13, 2022 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/13/opinion/america-falling-apart.html>
- 4 Richard Rohr, “Community as Alternative Consciousness,” daily email devotional, Monday, June 1st, 2020 <https://cac.org/community-as-alternative-consciousness-2020-06-01/>
- 5 David Lose, “*...in the Meantime*,” July 3, 2014 Commentary on Matthew 9:32-34 <https://www.davidlose.net/2014/07/matthew-9-32-34/>