

Living out the Image of God

Luke 4:1-14

It is often Lent when we start to think about resisting temptation, but this year, as we approach Christmas and all the enticing adverts are hitting the TV - originally intended to spread out the shoppers frenzy from 2 weeks in December to control the spread of the Virus - we are being tempted in many directions!

I did not know that I NEEDED £3 off a jar of Percy Pig sweeties. I was unaware of my need for an animatronic Baby Yoda costing £60, or a Vtech Kidizoom creator cam... an interactive pet with pink ears or in the reinvention of the tamagotchi, a robot interactive ballon dog... Just to let my family know - none of these items will be bought for you...

Supermarkets are offering 'full menu planning' to make your life easier and to 'take the stress out of Christmas food buying by getting it all in one place - and even though the chances of a regular Christmas are looking unlikely - even the clothes and fashion people are still trying to sell special clothing for Christmas Day at home - loungewear with sequins and heels anyone?

There is always something to resist! Always some temptation. And in a year such as we have had where we have been starved of variety of company, corralled into work from home and furloughed places, bubbled up with the same (albeit wonderful people) for weeks on end - we might be looking for a splurge - to think, you know what, we deserve it... Temptation to fall into debt is greater at this time of year, when we want to show our loved ones the truth of our love for them with deep and extravagant gifting. I get it. But this year, there is a greater risk than ever of falling into debt. Furlough and uncertainty for our global, national, local and personal economies mean that care must be taken and loving care given to what we can do...

Before Christmas, even before Advent, it's not a bad time to talk about temptation - about what we need and what we perceive we need in order to be properly satisfied with ourselves, those whom we love and look after - and this stems from our relationship with God, in whose image we are made and by whose care the world is created and for whose good purposes Jesus came, fully human to share in our human weakness.

The second Adam, as Jesus is known in 1 Corinthians 15:45, is the man who obeys the divine law as a man. The temptations he is presented with are ones that could be argued are his 'right' or he 'deserves' them. We straight away notice the reference to the provision of bread for the Hebrew people wandering for 40 years in the Wilderness. Jesus is in the desert for 40 days and, humanly, he was hungry at the end of them. The manna in the wilderness appeared on the ground - "white like coriander seeds and tasting like wafers made with honey." Even the passing reference to it would be mouthwatering... the human weakness and frailty is such that we can leap to fix our problems before seeking God's will. The devil linked Jesus' mind to not only his bodily requirements but also the provision of God for his people - being the Son of God, providing for himself would be easy. If. If he just...

What is notable is that although the devil persuades with scriptural references, it is not going to honour God if Jesus claims the power to transform the bread for his incarnate needs. There is a pause: what has God called Jesus aside for? Why is Jesus here on earth? Will Jesus be any less the Son of God if he doesn't "prove it" to the devil?

Jesus is called aside to fully rely on God. To choose to trust God for his earthly -and that includes bodily - needs.

Jesus is here on earth to BE fully human.

And, no - proving anything to the devil will not affect its truth...

It is the full reliance on God that we can see and learn from here. Jesus did not play twister with his calling and purpose, wrangling scripture to do his bidding... He goes back to the law of God in Deuteronomy: 8 verse 3, "*God took away your pride when he let you get hungry, and then he fed you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had ever seen. This was to teach you that a person does not live on bread alone, but by everything the Lord says.*" NCV

If Jesus is to trust God, he can trust that the promise of God will sustain him and the word of God that is in his heart will guide him. The scriptures are a source of strength for Jesus - and they can be for us too. They enable Jesus to resist the temptation and to persist in honouring his calling and trusting in God's faithfulness. We do well to remember the problems Abraham got himself into when he didn't trust in God's provision and ended up seeking out Pharaoh's assistance in Genesis 12. He ended up pretending that Sarah was his sister, and not his wife - which led to Sarah being part of Pharaoh's suite of concubines, which ended up with Pharaoh getting some nasty skin conditions, which led to him releasing her and Abraham... Messy! Resist temptation and Persist in following God's plan and law. Which is what Jesus does...

Jesus is not here on earth to prove his power and glory. He is not here to offer worship to other deities and powers in pursuit of promoting an easier way of life or being famous verses 6-7. He knows that to have faith in the Word of God, to Worship God and to live to show God in who he is - all this will be the best example for his followers as well as being the salvation for his own soul. Jesus is not on earth to wield the immense power of God, but the empty himself of it all, resisting the temptations of worship, of showiness, of falling for the idolatry of being on the high place. His heart remains undivided; un-torn by the shredding that the devil would attempt to accomplish.

Jesus is hungry - but this does not make him suggestible, or lead him to make poor choices - something we could all do well to remember as Christmas approaches and we find ourselves hungry for 'treats' and 'celebration'. Our undivided heart will remain whole as we resist temptation and persist in following Jesus, who will meet our needs and fulfil our longing.

We do not need the attention of rulers and the splendour that comes from aspirational living. We need the assurance of God with us as we are reminded of why we are here and what our calling is... as parents, grandparents, students of all ages, tinies, aunties, uncles, friends and neighbours we have a calling to be close to God. It is a deliberate choice we make again and again in the face of temptation... Jesus deliberately chooses to be fully human, to lay aside his divine majesty and power, the glory of his trinitarian value and to be the Second Adam, able to be obedient to God's perfect will, to be the Saviour of the World.

So we too persist in seeking after the things of God, and there we will know true satisfaction. We don't have to be shredded by seeking to prove ourselves, our love for our families or our need to have a huge and lavish celebration because "we deserve it". What we do deserve is to resist this and know the truth that we are loved by a wonderful God and saved by a Mighty and Faithful Saviour. We do not deserve his love, but he pours it out on us anyway. We haven't earned a place

in God's family, but he calls us Sons and Daughters anyway. We put aside what we feel we need, what we feel would be good and trust that in following the Word of God and in sharing the good news of this Saviour's love for all people, that we can avoid some festive temptations and know the joy that comes from a free heart and a confident Spirit.

Resist temptation

Persist in following Jesus, for the glory of God

Amen.