

**“The temptations of Jesus”, a sermon based on Luke 4:1-13 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on 10 March 2019, the first Sunday of Lent.**

Luke puts the story of the temptations of Jesus after the baptism of Jesus and before his ministry. Luke says that at the baptism of Jesus, a voice came from heaven – “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Then Luke give us the ancestry of Jesus, a long list of names, ending with “son of Adam, son of God.”

Then Luke tells us the story of how Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. He is there for forty days. It means a long time.

And we hear repeatedly the tiny word “if”, a word that does much damage. A little word that carries the weight of temptation. So plausible. So innocuous. So destructive.

“If you are the Son of God, command this stone ...”

“If you will worship me ...”

“If you are the son of God, throw yourself ...”

The voice from heaven was unconditional – “You are my Son, the beloved.”

The other voice is conditional ... “if you are the Son of God ...”

If ... the possibility that I am not who God says I am. A question is posed. What enters our heart is self-doubt that can lead to distrust of others, that they are not who they were created to be in God.

The seemingly innocent word, *if*, untethers us from who we are in God. We are pushed out to sea, adrift, unsecured, from our humanness, our identity in God.

How often we hear that word.

If ... if you were a person of God then you would do this or that ...

If ... if you were called of God then these things would happen

If ... if you were of God then these things would not happen to you

If ... if you followed Jesus you would not feel as you do ...

If you were a real minister, Christian, elder, scholar, student, teacher ... you fill in the words

Prove who you are!

Remember the claims that Barack Obama was not born in USA, that he was really a Muslim. Again and again and again, he was pushed to prove himself. So doubt was created.

Three times Jesus hears the word "if".

Each has to do with who Jesus is, what he does. Temptation is about what we can do, not things we cannot do. It is our strength that is questioned.

1. "if you are the son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

Jesus works with stone ... that is our hope. Jesus turns stone to bread ... that is what he does with us, with you and me. But it is not the stone that needs commanding ... it is us. Through the life, ministry, teaching of Jesus, living bread is baked and broken and shared.

He need not prove who he is ... this is what he gives himself to ... this is what he does ... who he is ... one who turns stone to bread. That is what we mark today in this Communion meal.

Malcolm Guite puts it like this:

*Now He must dare, with us, to make a choice.  
In a distended belly's cruel curve  
He feels the famine of the ones who lose  
He starves for those whom we have forced to starve  
He chooses now for those who cannot choose.  
He is the staff and sustenance of life  
He lives for all from one Sustaining Word  
His love still breaks and pierces like a knife  
The stony ground of hearts that never shared,  
God gives through Him what Satan never could;  
The broken bread that is our only food.*

2. Then the devil took him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of this world – “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me ... If you will worship me, it will all be yours.”

“You could achieve so much by compulsion.” Yet through his influence, millions of people choose justice and compassion and love, captivated by the vision of shalom, of the whole of creation in harmony. “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.” That arises from Jesus getting under our skin, not by the exercise of power and compulsion.

Malcolm Guite: **All the Kingdoms of the World**

*‘So here’s the deal and this is what you get:  
The penthouse suite with world-commanding views,  
The banker’s bonus and the private jet  
Control and ownership of all the news  
An ‘in’ to that exclusive one percent,  
Who know the score, who really run the show  
With interest on every penny lent  
And sweeteners for cronies in the know.  
A straight arrangement between me and you  
No hell below or heaven high above  
You just admit it, and give me my due  
And wake up from this foolish dream of love...’  
But Jesus laughed, ‘You are not what you seem.  
Love is the waking life, you are the dream.’*

3. Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple ... If you are the son of God, throw yourself down from here

If you are the Son of God, give people certainty. In the middle of the religious community, make people believe. Remove their doubt.

Malcolm Guite: **On the Pinnacle**

*‘Temples and Spires are good for looking down from;  
You stand above the world on holy heights,  
Here on the pinnacle, above the maelstrom,  
Among the few, the true, unearthly lights.  
Here you can breathe the thin air of perfection*

*And feel your kinship with the lonely star,  
Above the shadow and the pale reflection,  
Here you can know for certain who you are.  
The world is stalled below, but you could move it  
If they could know you as you are up here,  
Of course they'll doubt, but here's your chance to prove it  
Angels will bear you up, so have no fear....'  
'I was not sent to look down from above  
It's fear that sets these tests and proofs, not Love.'*

Living a Spirit-filled life involves testing. What is tested is our resting in our identity in Christ. We don't need to prove it. The voice at our baptism is unconditional "You are my child, my beloved; with you I am well pleased."  
No if, no buts, no maybes.

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