

Lent 1, 2010
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Luke 4. 1 ff

We turn this day to the Gospel lesson, Luke chapter 4, and the story of the Temptation of our Lord.

Grace mercy and peace be multiplied among you all, in the knowledge of God, and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, AMEN.

A few words today. Some random thoughts and insights. On the subject of temptation, and the Christian life.

One. Temptation is a lie, built out of scraps of truth. I've said this before, it's important enough to repeat again today, temptation is a lie. Built out of scraps of truth. You think you've been treated unfairly by your boss, or your gym teacher. You feel like you've been insulted by a friend, or a co-worker, or your spouse, and the fact is. You may be right! You may be right, things like that happen in this world of ours, you may in fact have been hurt by somebody, and that's the truth! The *temptation*, is to take this scrap of truth, and build a great big lie. "Everyone's out to get me, nobody likes me it's all unfair, better to stick it to them before they stick it to me"—no. Anger, resentment, that's the temptation, it's a big lie! Built, as it were, from a scrap of truth.

You may have the impression that in America today, it's important to have money. Where on earth you'd get that idea, heaven only knows, but let's say

you've gotten the impression that money matters today. Ok. There's a scrap of truth there. But you can't let that scrap of truth become a gigantic lie, who and what matters most to you in life? Huh? What matters most to you, and is any of it for sale? Can any of it be bought at any price? Money matters, so manage it faithfully, there's your scrap of truth. But be careful, lest the devil take this little scrap, and build a life-defeating lie.

Which of course is what he tried to pull on Jesus, in the Gospel lesson today. There was not one thing that Satan said to Jesus that was an out and out lie, ok? Not one thing he said was totally false, everything had a scrap of truth to it—including verse 6, who doles out “the power and glory” of this world. Including verses 10 and 11, where Scripture is quoted. Scraps of truth—which the Adversary then tried to build into big lies about what you should worship and how you should live; whose will you should follow; so forth. The challenge for us then, with the help of God, learn to discern the difference between the small truth and the big lie. Then with God's help learn to live the greater truth, of the Kingdom of heaven.

Second. Temptation may not always be that bad. Seriously. There's a good side to temptation; it can teach us. Look at Jesus. The Devil says in verse 4, “You have the power to make bread miraculously appear!” And, ok, the Devil's right—and later of course Jesus will do that very thing, He'll

miraculously produce *tons* of bread when He feeds the 5000! Figuring out why it was wrong to produce bread *here*, maybe leads to an understanding of why it's right *there*. So also for us—it seems to me we often learn what's right, by first figuring out what's wrong. Part of what it means to be human, I guess—see what's right, by first seeing clearly what's wrong, so temptation if dealt with faithfully. Big if. But temptation if dealt with faithfully, can teach.

Another not so bad thing about temptation—in a back-handed way it shows God at work in your life. God wants to be at work in your life, otherwise you wouldn't feel temptation. Look at it this way: It's pointless to say a Wall Street executive is tempted by greed. It's meaningless to say a rap music “artist” is tempted by profanity. They've sold out so completely and so long ago, there's no struggle left! But for you to wrestle with your thoughts and words and deeds, for you to struggle with attitudes and actions and so seek a higher path. For you to realize that you are in fact being tempted! Is also for you to know, that God is there tugging you in another direction. God has not given up on you in life, that's part of what you're saying when you admit you're being tempted. God has not given up on you! And if God hasn't given up on you, you don't have to give up either.

Three. While temptation is not *all* bad, we'd be fools to think it's all good.

Temptation is and remains dangerous, and we are never out of the woods. I point you to the most frightening verse in the whole Bible, it's verse 13 in your text. It says the Devil finished every tests and departed. Until an opportune time. Jesus was never really out of the woods so to speak. Neither are we.

Remain vigilant. Remain in prayer. Be prepared—and listen. By now you ought to know what situations in life are tempting to you, and you ought to be wise enough to prepare spiritually in advance! I never coach a soccer game, for instance, without first saying a prayer: “God, I’d rather lose the game than lose my temper. This is not going to be easy so show me the way.” Ok? Temptation happens, we know that. At this point in your life, do you have any real excuse for not being prepared spiritually?

Finally. #4? About God. Remember the Lord’s Prayer, God does not lead us into temptation. But. God most certainly does lead us to those places, where temptation happens. Look again at Jesus. Did God tempt Him? No. Plainly the Devil did. But God the Spirit did lead Jesus out into the wilderness, where everybody knew temptation was waiting. Likewise, us. If we could sit here safely in church all week, maybe we don’t get tempted, but God won’t let us sit here all week. God leads us back to work and family and school and leisure. God puts us out there with others, God gives us moments

alone, where's your wilderness? Do you know? Where's your wilderness?

And, even more, where's your God?

I'll give you a hint. He's out there with you, even as He was out there with Jesus. As Luther once said, and I paraphrase, God may lead you to places of temptation, but God does not leave you there! We are not abandoned to our fate, we are saved to His kingdom! We are not left alone to struggle and fail, we are helped and guided and forgiven and sustained step of the way by the very Spirit of God, the same Spirit there with Jesus, the same Spirit which raised the Lord from the dead. If the Spirit can raise Jesus from the dead, the Spirit can forgive and guide and renew you today. If the Spirit can raise the dead, the Spirit can bring on the Kingdom; as we pray He will for us all, and quickly. In the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.