

Luke - Jesus and the Temptations

Jan 26, 2025

Nelson Cathedral

OT: Ps 91: 1-2, 9-16

NT: Romans 10:5-13

Gospel: Luke 4:1-13

Introduction

In the world of politics this has been some week, with the swearing-in of the 47th US President. As part of the inauguration events there was the National Prayer Service at the Washington Episcopal/Anglican Cathedral and the world looked on in interest, as the Bishop of Washington, the Right Rev. Mariann Budde, said to the President in her sermon, *“I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now”*.

Now we are not discussing the rights or wrongs of US politics, but for some people these words could be seen as Prophetic: at long last someone has said something

by speaking truth to power, challenging the political direction being taken.

It would have taken courage to speak on such a public stage. But who can argue that “mercy” is a core Christian value and the very sign of God’s love for us, which we are called to show to others.

Over the past weeks we have heard prophetic voices from Luke’s Gospel point to who Jesus truly is. We are going to keep following Luke’s Gospel and his portrayal of Jesus as we explore the focus of the Gospels - that Jesus is the promised Messiah, a prophetic Messiah, the Son of God.

In Jesus, God was calling his people back to himself but also redefining what was meant by the term “God’s people”. Now it was God’s Son who was doing the calling – Jesus as prophet, but also Jesus who was more than a prophet.

Jesus was a prophet, not in an earthly sense but in a godly sense. Jesus doesn't just speak God's words to us...he is God's word to us.

But even more than this, when Jesus was baptised as Luke recalls, the voice of God stated that Jesus is the "Son of God".

But what does Jesus being the "Son of God" mean? A question that begins to be answered in our reading today.

Gospel Comparisons.

In setting the scene for the temptation of Jesus, Luke very carefully identifies the sonship of Jesus, especially through his record of the:

- Conception and birth of Jesus
- the baptism of Jesus
- and the genealogy of Jesus

If we look at the other Gospel accounts, Mark and Matthew along with Luke, all begin Jesus' ministry, with the account of the temptation in the desert, because this encounter begins to unpack what being the Son of God means.

Mark, being the first Gospel written down, provides a very short description: "The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and the angels took care of him. (Mark 1: 12-13).

Both Matthew and Luke follow these themes but give us more detail, but the order of the last two is different, highlighting where these Gospel accounts begin and end.

However, a common feature is that both Matthew and Luke carefully parallel the Jesus story with the story of Israel and Moses.

If we look back at the Israel's hope for a Messiah a Saviour, this expectation was always linked with the promise of a prophet like Moses. In Deut 18: 15 and 18 Moses says to the people:

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people”.

Jesus is identified as the fulfilment of this promise, especially in the story of the temptation where the situations faced by Jesus mirror that of Moses and Israel in the desert. Jesus in word and action succeeds where Israel had failed.

1. The first temptation to turn stones into bread (Luke 4:3-4) alludes to Israel's 40 years in the desert and God's provision of manna for Israel to eat (Exodus 16:3,15).

Jesus could have acted to meet his own needs, but the issue here was about independence from

God's will. For Jesus, and us, life is defined by doing God's will.

2. In the second temptation Jesus is tested to gain power (Luke 4:5-8) by abandoning his loyalty to his Father and avoiding all that lies ahead. We see this again as Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion...*“Father not my will but yours”*.

On offer was a short-cut. Jesus already had all the authority and power but this came from his relationship with God the Father - not from anyone else which would equate to idolatry. Jesus' response was to quote the Shema prayer (Deut 6:13; 10:20), “to worship the Lord your God and service him only”.

Again, for Jesus and for us, with worship comes service, there are no short-cuts.

3. Finally, Jesus is taken to the highest point of the temple, a temptation to test God's faithfulness (Luke 4:9-12; see Ps 91:11-12). To test God in such a way would show a lack of faith in God and provide Jesus with a way to avoid the totality of human life, even death.

But in response, Jesus submits himself to God and again quotes Moses by saying, "do not put the Lord your God to the test" (Deut 6:16).

Adam

There is a second parallel story that Luke makes more explicit than Matthew. Luke takes the genealogy of Jesus back to Adam -the one who represents all of humanity, and then ultimately God (Luke 3: 38).

- Yes Jesus is the fulfilment of Scripture;
- Yes Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah;
- Yes Jesus is the saviour of us all.

The encounter between Jesus and the devil begins with Jesus starving in the desert, a situation opposite to that of Adam in the garden of Eden, surrounded by all of God's provision. Even the lies of temptation are similar, with the twisting of God's words..."did God really say that"... , including the offer by the devil, "to follow me and you will be like God". But where Adam and Eve failed in their temptation by choosing independence from God, Jesus succeeded.

Jesus is the true Son of God empowered by the Holy Spirit (4:1), who remains faithful to God the Father no matter what the cost, walking the path of humble service. That is what Jesus being the Son of God means.

But in taking Jesus' lineage back to Adam, Luke is also reminding us that in being the Son of God, Jesus is also fully human in every way. Where the line of Adam fails, Jesus shows us true humanity and true divinity. And

when we fail, Jesus offers us true forgiveness and the certainty of God's promises.

US

1. In writing his account of the temptation of Jesus, Luke has identified what being the Son of God means, as Jesus shows his faithfulness to and his dependence upon God the Father.

2. Luke also draws us into the story of Jesus by identifying Jesus as God's fulfilment for all of humanity. God's history becomes our history, God's fulfilment our fulfilment, God's love our love to receive.

As we heard in the reading from Romans 10:12-13:

“There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, the same Lord is Lord of all... for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

The message of Jesus is for all who will listen – God's grace is given to all.

3. In looking at the responses of Jesus to the temptations, we can see the priority for our lives “to worship the Lord God, and serve him only” (Luke 4:12).

This is the centre of Jesus' life, ministry and teaching, the fulfilment of the Old Testament law to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut 4:4-9, 11:13-31; Num 15:37-41).

We too face challenges and temptations:

- to forget our baptismal identity as one of God's children and try to be independent from God.
- to be successful rather than faithful,
- to seek material not spiritual security, seeking comfort rather than sacrifice.

Therefore, we should be wary of any pursuit, priority and preoccupation that diverts us from the path Jesus followed – to worship the Lord God and serve him only. We are called to be faithful to God as children of God, just as God is faithful to us in Jesus.

4. Finally, the identifying marks of Jesus' life were "being full of the Holy Spirit" and prayer. As followers of Jesus, the same is true for us. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers our lives and who can guide us through the difficult times. And it is prayer that strengthens and grows our relationship with Jesus.

As this year gathers pace, may we ask ourselves how our relationship with Jesus is going, how is the Holy at work in our lives, and how are we loving the Lord with all our being?

Conclusion:

The significance of Luke's portrayal of Jesus is that Luke has written it specifically for us. In a sense this is our Gospel, written to tell non-Jews the story of Jesus, that we too are included in the "embrace of God's overpowering love" (Luttenberger).

Jesus is not only the fulfilment of Israel's history as Messiah, but also the centre of human history - our history - the gift of grace to us all.

We are all included within God's promise so that we can call on the name of the Lord and be saved. And our response is to live in faithfulness to God in all we face. Amen.