

Walking with Jesus

on the road to the cross

Lent
2021

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Week 2

TEMPTATION



Scripture

Matthew 4:1-11

I have a fridge magnet that says, "Lead me not into temptation, I can usually find my own way there!" The theme for today is '*The temptation of Christ*'.

Matthew's gospel sets out to answer the question, 'Who is Jesus?' But in the Wilderness Jesus is forced to wrestle with that very question before he starts his public ministry.

There is a great deal of talk around about 'identity' but, here,

Jesus is faced with decisions about who he will choose to be.

Will he embrace his identity as the "Son of God" (Matthew 3:17) or will he discard that identity in favour of being someone else? This is the question sitting barely disguised beneath each of the temptations that the devil aims at Jesus. Everything turns on the answers Jesus will give. The devil knows that. And Jesus knows that! This is precisely the ground on which the battle will be lost or won.

1st SUNDAY IN LENT (contd)

The First Temptation—To satisfy Self



Read Matthew 4:2. This verse reminds us of the forty years that the Israelites wandered in the Wilderness after being rescued from Egypt.

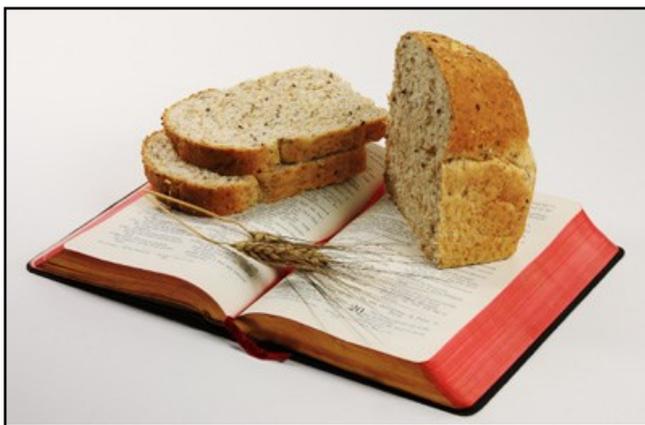
Read through Deuteronomy 8:2-3. What was the Lord trying to teach them? Surely it was that they were to

rely on him for the provision of their daily needs? The daily manna would rain down from heaven, more than enough to satisfy them, and to teach them where true satisfaction for all their hungers was to be found.

So, here is Jesus, hungry: “Tell these stones to become bread.” In other words, “Satisfy yourself!” Jesus answered: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’.”

(Matthew 4:4)

Jesus knows why he has come. Not to satisfy self, but to satisfy others. He alone is the bread of life.



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1st SUNDAY IN LENT (contd)

The Second Temptation—To save Self

Read Matthew 4:5. The devil is a subtle tempter. Surely, all he is affirming is that Jesus' life is safe in his Father's hands, and that if Jesus' life were ever in danger, he would be saved from death.



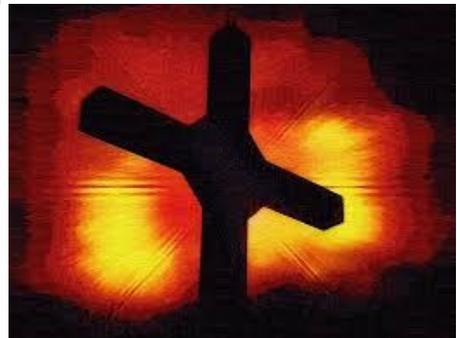
be his downfall, so what if he can get Jesus to avoid it?

This temptation will come to Jesus again and again, pursuing him all the way to the cross. It climaxes in Matthew 27:40 where we hear the jeering of the crowds around Jesus crying out, "Save yourself. Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God?"

The devil is very good at selectively quoting scripture. He is playing on something very deep here. He knows that Jesus' set purpose is to give up his life without being rescued at the last minute. The devil would have him follow a different path and not that of death on a cross; after all, a lot is at stake here.

The devil reads from Psalm 91:12 but very conveniently leaves out v13 which says: "You will tread on the lion and the cobra, you will trample the great lion and the serpent."

You see, the serpent (the devil) knows that the cross will



Jesus stands firm. "It is also written: do not put the Lord your God to the test." (Matthew 4:7; Deuteronomy 6:16). Jesus knows he can fully trust in the Father who loves him and delights in him, even if it means being saved through death rather than from it.

1st SUNDAY IN LENT (contd)

The Third Temptation—To serve Satan

Read Matthew 4:8. How arrogant Satan is. Is everything his to give? All of this and more belongs to Jesus anyway, although the devil does have some limited dominion in this fallen world. Many have knowingly or unknowingly bowed the knee to him, and his influences are present to a greater or lesser extent in the workings of so many worldly kingdoms.

But what is the devil offering Jesus here? It's the prospect of a coalition—ruling the kingdoms together ... 'Think of all the good we could achieve if we combined our resources?' A better world? No! It would be a world in which darkness is never fully overcome. Jesus does not march into battle looking for a truce, or to partner in the devil's agenda. Instead, as the Apostle

John says in 1 John 3:8, "The reason why the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."

So Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." Then, we are told in v11, "The devil then left him ... "



Prayer

"The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."

Lord, we are constantly being tempted, as you were, by the evil one. Help us, when we are tempted, to remember who we are, 'God's beloved children', and help us to choose to

embrace our identity and not to give in to his lies. Thank you that you will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can endure and that you will provide a way out for us. Amen.

Matthew 4:18-22 **“Come, follow me”**

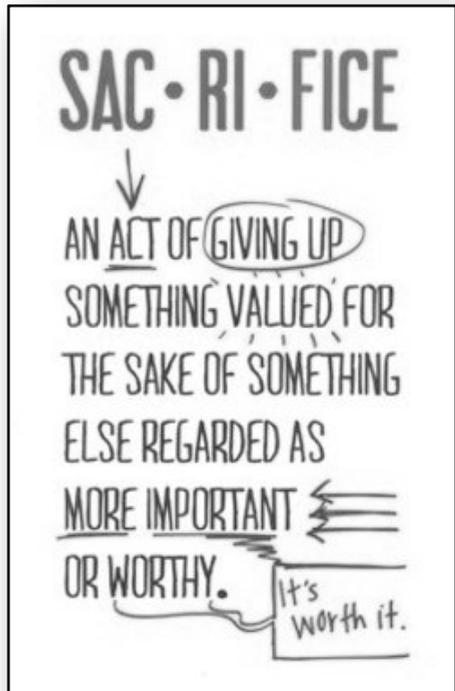
What on earth did Jesus mean? Let’s explore that over the next few days.

Following Jesus means, firstly, ‘dying to self’. “Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves his life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” (John 12:24)

Jesus is talking about dying to self, sacrifice, restraint. For Jesus this would cost him his life. So following Jesus isn’t only about being ‘blessed’ or being happy, because there will be times when he calls for restraint and self-sacrifice, giving up something that we are attached to. However, holiness isn’t just about giving things up.

During Lent we traditionally give up things and sometimes that becomes the goal—giving up chocolates! No, we give up something to make room for something better. We give up something we love, something we are attached to, in order to strengthen our loy-

alty and faithfulness to Jesus. We lay down our lives metaphorically speaking and maybe literally so that we can take up a new life with Jesus. So following Jesus means giving up our old life in order to receive whatever Jesus calls us to.



Prayer

Heavenly Father, we live in a world which encourages us to indulge our every whim, but you are calling us to live differently. Please teach us the virtue of self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Matthew 4:18-22 **“Come follow me”.**

Yesterday we saw that Jesus called Peter to follow him. So following Jesus means just that, following him. He says this twice (vs19 & 22.)

Later, after Peter’s denial and Jesus’ death and resurrection, Jesus takes Peter aside after breakfast for a difficult conversation. “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” he asks Peter (John 21:15-17). We’re not

going to argue as to whether he meant “these [other disciples]” or Peter’s love for his work— fishing, or whatever ... because Jesus ties this call to follow him with another command, “Feed my sheep.” Following Jesus means walking with him, following wherever he leads, into an uncertain future where things could

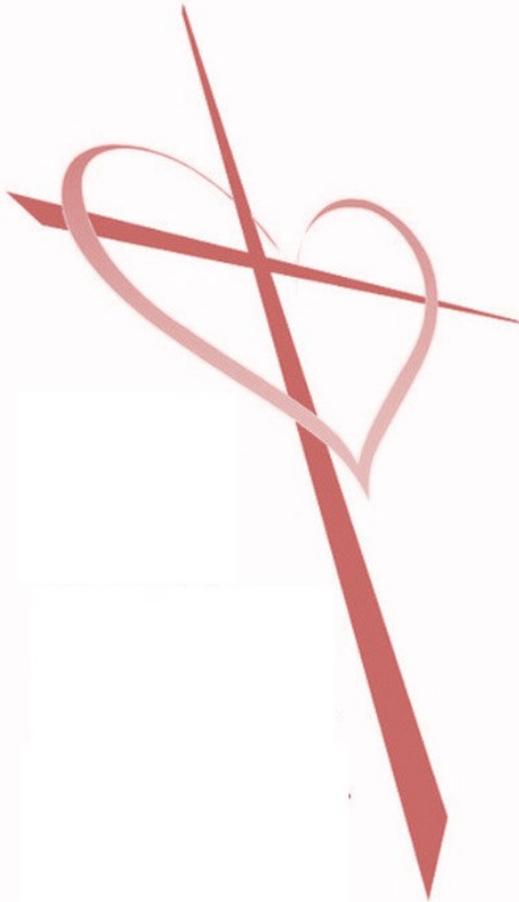
be risky and where he will certainly take us out of our comfort zone. But Jesus calls us to trust him, and to take care of each other. He calls us together with others, to walk with them and to take care of them and allow them to take care of us.



Prayer

Almighty God, our hope and strength, without you we falter. Help us to follow Christ and to live according to your will. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Matthew 4:18-22 “Come, follow me”



Following Jesus also means imitating him. “Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God

and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commands us” (1 John 3: 21-23).

We love, because he first loved us. He calls us to that same sacrificial love, laying down our lives for each other. “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.”
(John 15:13-14)

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, take all my freedom, my memory, my understanding, and my will. All I have and cherish, you have given me. I surrender it all to be guided by your will. Your grace and your love are wealth enough for me. Give me these, Lord Jesus, and I ask for nothing more. Amen..

Matthew 4:18-22 **“Come follow me”.**

Following Jesus is not always going to be easy, but it is not burdensome.

“This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everything born of God overcomes the world.”
(1 John 5:2-4)

God does not call us to be ‘solitary disciples’ but to be a part of his family. The opening verses of John’s Gospel seem to come to a crescendo in v12: “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

The purpose of this Gospel is to show how we can become God’s children; how we can be adopted into God’s family, how we can become part of God’s community. This is belonging at its most basic, fundamental level and for some of us that may be hard to grasp and there may be a conflict.

You see, it’s more important than my background, my family, my national identity, my sexual identity or whatever identity we’ve constructed for ourselves.

And how do we become this child of God? How are we adopted into this family? John tells us, “We believe in his Son.” For John, believing (verb) is something dynamic. It’s trust in him, or abiding in him, or staying with him, which enables us to be adopted by God into his family.

This is so important for John that he puts it at the beginning of the Gospel (1:12) and at the end (20:31). “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”. Jesus is talking about this dynamic trust, staying connected to him and to each other.

Prayer

Lord, you call us to your service. Continue your saving work among us. May your love never abandon us. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 4:18-22
“Come, follow me”

So Jesus calls us to believe in him, to trust him. But this is just the beginning. We all start off with a mustard seed of faith but our understanding of who Jesus is has to grow as we go along.

Nicodemus, one of Israel’s leaders who visited Jesus at night to avoid drawing attention to his quest, recognises Jesus for who he is:

“He’s the King of Israel, he’s the Son of God.” But

Jesus challenges him to go further, to consider that a new birth by the Spirit is needed to really grasp the truths of the kingdom.

The Samaritan woman whom Jesus speaks to at the well, has an idea that he could be the Messiah, but Jesus wants her to understand more, to realise that he is the one who can give her ‘living water’.

The crowd of 5000, whom Jesus miraculously feeds with bread and fish, need to learn that he is

the one who can give them bread from heaven.

Mary and Martha, through the untimely death of their brother Lazarus, confronted by the reality of death and loss, learn that Jesus is ‘the resurrection and the life’ as he raises Lazarus back to life.



So Jesus calls us to live our lives in his company, and to grow in our understanding of who he is and who we are in him. This sense of our identity as children of God

will grow as we live out our faith within God’s family, by imitating him and by learning from each other. We belong to him and he wants us to act and behave like him. So he calls us to follow him!

Prayer

God of Love, bring us back to you. Send your Spirit to make us strong in faith and active in good works. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Matthew 4:18-22 **“Come, follow me”**

Jesus said: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12) Beautiful words which we quote and have on our fridge magnets; but what do they mean?

So let’s try to understand this verse in its Jewish context. To Jesus’ Jewish listeners, those who walked in ‘darkness’ were people who were sinners. And sin was not something abstract, but specific, such as pride, greed, hardness of heart, immorality or injustice, to name a few. These are the works of darkness. So when Jesus says: “I am the light of the world” what does he mean?

In Psalm 119, the Torah is referred to as a lamp that gave light and showed people the way. Here, Jesus is saying that his life is like a lamp that will give light not only to the Jews but to the entire world. Simeon had prophesied over the baby Jesus in the Temple that he would be “a light for revelation to the



Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.”

So to follow Jesus is to be rescued from the darkness of sin, and to be guided by his teachings, to learn to apply his truths to our lives and know the light of his presence. Then we will not walk in darkness. His Spirit guides us as we learn to listen for his voice and the Spirit helps us to respond. “My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me.” (John 10:27-31)

Prayer

God of mercy, unite your church in the Holy Spirit that we may serve you with all our hearts and work together with unselfish love. May everything we do begin with your inspiration and continue with your saving help. Amen.

