

Geoff's sermon for Lent 1

Luke 4 1-13

They say every preacher has one sermon
And 1001 ways of preaching it

And it worries me
that I may sometimes seem to be repeating myself
but this is the central message of our faith
that God loves us

in our confirmation class on Friday night
we were going through the ten commandments

and I was making the point that God didn't give us these because He's some kind of
jealous ogre
who must be obeyed

but because He's a loving, caring Father
who wants no harm to come to His children

God knows what's best for us
He wants us to have no other gods
to distract us away from His love and protection

Question one to consider this Lent
what are your little gods?
And what are you doing
to prevent them from distracting you
from the one true God?

He wants no spats or rows between us
So murder, lies, theft, envy and jealousy
are definitely out of the question

and of course,
He loves us so much that He gave His only Son
To die on the cross for us

I have to admit
That sometimes I think
"Son of God" isn't a helpful description for Jesus

I mean - How can we talk of a loving Father
When He sends His one and only Son
on a mission like this?

"Okay Son,
Now, you're going to arrive in cold smelly backroom
In a country under siege from an occupying army

Your foster father will be a poor and humble carpenter
And you'll be the cause of great distress and shame

to your unmarried parents

From the moment you arrive on earth
People will want you dead
In fact your birth will spark a massacre
of hundreds of newborn baby boys

your mission will begin with 40 days of blazing heat
without food or water
where you'll come face to face with my arch-enemy

and throughout your ministry
you'll be accused, scorned, persecuted and rejected"

"Oh – right – okay dad
But it will all turn out right in the end won't it?
I mean,
I bet you've got some really awesome final scene lined up for me – right dad?"

"Well – erm – yes Son – eventually it all turns out right
In the end!"

Following Jesus isn't always the easiest path
And there are times when we all feel out in the desert
When we all wonder what kind of *loving* Father this is

But we must never forget
that God did this - to His own flesh and blood - for us
and He did triumph over it – in the end

so let's take a closer look at this passage
so we can take our Lenten journey in our stride
and understand why it's so important to fast and to pray

Note first that Luke says
Jesus is "led by the Spirit into the desert"

The Holy Spirit is God's power,
He often works as God's voice
That "still small voice" of the soul

And it's worth noting here,
that He doesn't always whisper sweet nothings
or words of assurance

sometimes we need to be prepared to listen
even when we don't particularly like what we hear!

They say Christianity isn't pie in the sky when you die
But steak on the plate while you wait
And as we've all heard on the news this week
It may not always be genuine *beef* steak on offer

Let the buyer beware!

The one thing I can guarantee
Is that as long as you are sure this is God's voice
He will NEVER mislead you

Which is much more than can be said for the Devil

The next thing to take note
Jesus isn't having a physical conversation
With a little man in red tights
With a pitch fork and horns on his head!

Our enemy is much more subtle than that

Satan is the world's greatest ventriloquist
He's expert at making us think
That the voice is coming from another direction
or another person entirely

So lesson one this morning
Be very careful to discern
just who it is whispering in your ear

He who leads you out into the desert
Is not necessarily your enemy
And he who offers you help there
May not necessarily be your friend!

Oh, by the way
Why do we start Lent with pancakes?
Cos Jesus was tempted in the dessert!

He's tempted with food
He's tempted with power
And He's tempted with protection

Note the devil begins by sowing a seed of doubt
"If you are the Son of God"...

How many times does he throw that one at you?
"if you are a Christian..."

Satan has a cunning way of making us feel ashamed
"Call yourself a Christian!"

He does it to undermine our faith
He does it to try to condemn us
To make us feel so badly
that we're way beyond God's forgiveness
that we're a million miles away from His love

but what does Paul say to the Romans this morning?
"The word is near you"

And if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord",
and *believe in your heart*
that God raised him from the dead,
you will be saved.

That's it, plain and simple
that's the *steak on the plate* right there
The message of the gospel in a nutshell
(or in a pie case)

That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord,
and *believe in your heart*
that God raised him from the dead,
you will be saved.

And neither death nor life, nor angels nor demons,
neither the present nor the future,
nor any powers,
neither height nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God
that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Satan may be a good ventriloquist
But he's a lousy liar!

The word is near you
And the very best way of knowing
whether it's God or Satan whispering in your ear
Is to ask yourself this simple question
"Is this in accordance with what's in here?" (*bible*)

And that's a very good reason to know this well
To come to Lent Courses, Alpha Courses,
To do daily bible studies at home
And to come to church every Sunday

Now of course, some people doubt what's in here

For instance – has the question ever occurred to you
that if all this happened when Jesus was alone
How come Luke knows so much about it?

Well, as I've said before, Luke is very hot on detail
He goes to great lengths to ensure that we know
Exactly *what* happened, *when* it happened and *why*

Like Luke - God does everything for a purpose
He chooses and uses us according to our gifts

And my guess is, that knowing what an anorak Luke was
Somewhere, in a quiet moment
Jesus would have told the good doctor the whole story

But, let's just dwell on that for a moment
The fact is that Jesus was, *alone* with the Devil
A very dangerous place to be

And a very good reality check for all Christians
Is to ask ourselves regularly
"Am I living the same life in private as I do in public?"

"the things I do in full view of others
Am I the same in the privacy of my own home?
Behind closed doors?"

This is another extremely useful exercise
But one we shouldn't give up when Lent is over!

Let's face - that desert experience
wasn't exactly *steak on the plate* for Jesus
But He went through it - for us
that we might have steak, should we so desire

alas, many Christians are just happy with the last bit
the assurance that when they die they will go to heaven

and that's okay - but it's a great shame,
because to have life and have it abundantly
as God intended
you really should be eating well - best, prime steak,
the spiritual food Jesus survived on through the desert
is this, the word of God

Every time He was tempted, this is what He quoted
And here's my question to you this morning

Can you remember an appropriate verse
when you really need it?

And of course, it's not just remembering.
That's just egg and chips
Real steak is about knowing your lines
And living by them - in public AND in private

This is life's survival book
This is God's instruction manual

And far too many people
are bungling their way through life without it
And the devil is having a field day

Let me tell you something

He wouldn't have bothered Jesus
If he didn't think He was capable
of turning those stones into bread

the devil knows Jesus well – do you?

in Jesus, we have a formidable ally
and the closer we draw to Him
and the better we know Him
the more formidable He will be in our lives

so please - don't just pick this up on a Sunday
or when you are in trouble

make time every day to read a chapter
get yourself a daily reading guide

make a Lenten promise to read this daily
and carry on reading it after Easter

Robert Redford was once asked
if he'd ever been tempted
by the many girls who threw themselves at him
and he answered
"why send out for a burger
when you have steak at home?"

next time you're tempted away from the Lord
to try something quicker and easier
remember – this is 100% genuine Aberdeen Angus!