

Lent 2011 at Brentwood Presbyterian

The Temptations

March 13, 2011

**Psalm 32 & Matthew 4:1-11
(Hymns – 207, 592, 208, 768)**

The Ordination of Ruling Elders – Emmanuel Boadu & Maurice Harting

Readers and students of this passage
seem fascinated by the Evil One and his temptations.

I'm fascinated by the Holy One
and the positive strengths he used
to choose the way of flourishing.

We'll talk about the temptations,
but we'll look at them from a new perspective.
We'll look at them as barriers or things that interfere
with living a life in companionship with God and in the service of his kingdom.

Because that's what Christian flourishing is all about –
being with God and being a blessing to his creation.
It's that simple and that challenging.

The context of this story in Matthew is important.
It is set between the baptism of Jesus
and the beginning of his public ministry in Galilee.
In the baptism, the Spirit came to him
and God declared that Jesus was his own dear Son,
in whom he was well pleased.

As Matthew records it, the public ministry begins in Galilee,
is based in Capernaum,
fulfills a prophesy about light shining on those who live in a dark land of death,
and centres on the promise that the kingdom of God is near.
In the light of that gift from God, people are urged to turn away from their sin,
from the attitudes and behaviours that leave them in the dark
and bring on death.

So, that's the context in Matthew's account of the work of Jesus Christ
for the story of the temptations.
It's a time of testing and solidifying
the identity remembered in the baptism.

Jesus remembers that he is not alone,
but constantly accompanied by the Spirit
in whatever he does wherever he goes.
This is a very important point often missed by readers and students.
God is with Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit
through the 40 days in the wilderness.
There is no reason to fear.
God is with him – always.

First, Jesus remembers that his flourishing is nourished
not only by bread and physical food,
but by the wisdom that comes from his relationship
with his heavenly Father.
It is in companionship with the Source and Sustainer of being fully alive
that Jesus forms the thoughts and actions that serve God's kingdom.
It's not simply words, but the relationship that lies behind the words.
And it is loving God in return
(remember, God has declared his love for Jesus in the baptism)
and turning toward the way of being that best serves God's kingdom
that lies at the heart of Jesus' strength in the wilderness.
This is what gives him the courage and the confidence
to turn away from the temptations to settle for lesser things,
to serve ways of being that do not contribute to the coming of God's kingdom.

Second, Jesus remembers that it is God who is testing him,
not the other way around.
God is with him, a constant companion throughout this time of testing
the attitudes and behaviours that form his faith.
The presence of God is not found in flashy displays of miraculous power,
not found in splashy public spectacles.
It is found in the depths of the human soul,
guided and guarded by the Holy Spirit,
as it chooses the path to follow to flourishing.
Will it be delight or depression?
Will it be light or darkness?
Will it be life or death?

And it is important to note that God will not make that decision for you.
God provides all the support and strength you need to do it,
but the choice is yours.
And God does not give up if you get the choice wrong the first time,
or the second, or the third, or the thirty-third.
He is always with you, just as he promised.
You are one choice away from getting back into the way
of delight, light, and life.

Third, it is because of that constant, encouraging, enfolding love,
flowing from God to the creatures created in his own image,
that Jesus concludes his time of testing
with the affirmation that God alone is worthy of worship.

Why would you worship anything less?

The good of you, of your neighbours, of the whole creation
is best served by being with God and being a blessing to his creation.

Worship has to do with admiring love and devotion.

In the Christian tradition, it is an exuberant expression of gratitude
for the grace bestowed upon in the coming of the kingdom in Jesus Christ.

For us, giving our ultimate respect to anything less
would be a diminishing of delight,
a dimming of the light,
a capitulation to death.

I think this is a story not about temptations, but about resilience.

It's a story about the strength that God gives us
to flourish in his kingdom.

When God draws us to himself through faith in Jesus Christ,
working deep within us through the influence of the Holy Spirit,
we choose to live deeply satisfying lives that are pleasing to him.
We refuse to settle for anything less than God intended for us.

This morning, as we continue to do our part for the kingdom,
we will be ordaining Emmanuel and Maurice
as ruling elders in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

They have been called by God, elected by the congregation,
approved by Session, and now are being ordained
to serve this kind of resilience in this congregation
so that we can more faithfully
nourish souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.

We welcome their God-given gifts for leadership
that will strengthen the session's ability
to serve this congregation even better
in doing the work of Jesus Christ in this community and neighbourhood.

Thank you to both of you for choosing to answer this call
and blessing us with your giftedness.