

Sunday Morning Worship at Brentwood – Feb 14, 2016

First Sunday in Lent

Notes for the sermon on Times of Testing

Luke 4:1-14 – Sermon Text = Luke 4:1-2a

**Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from Jordan
and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,
where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.
(Luke 4:1-2a)**

[Hymns = 188, 205, 775]

**Key focus = there is a consistent and coherent theme in the testing
experienced by Christians in any age
– choose to be loyal to God or to something else – a life and death question**



The Test

- I hated tests in school – hated taking them, hated giving them, hated marking them – I did well, for the most part, except for second-year Greek in theological college, but I hated them
- I suspect part of that intense feeling was a conviction that there is no final, right-or-wrong answer that we will learn in this life – we live, as Paul pointed out so powerfully, “seeing through a glass darkly” – we need to be humble about what we think we know about this relationship with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit that gives us true and flourishing life – confident in the relationship but humble in our attitude to how fully we understand it –

- But this is a different kind of testing that we are pondering this week – this is a testing of our response to the relationship that God has established with us – not promised, not offered, but actually established, without our permission, or involvement, or, oftentimes, awareness – God is, quite simply, with us, in us, and for us – that is the reality in which we live, and move, and have our being – how we respond to that reality determines the quality of our flourishing in the grace of Jesus Christ – accept it or reject it – and by ignoring it, we reject it

The Tests of our Times

- Jesus helps us understand this kind of testing – three things about Luke’s account of the Temptations that struck me this week – 1) he is full of the Spirit – indeed, the Spirit leads him into the wilderness where he is tempted – so, God is with him – 2) the devil, this personification of evil, tests Jesus loyalty to God – that’s the core of any test of this nature – any challenge to our true calling to bless God’s creation – 3) Jesus quotes the covenant as remembered in Deuteronomy, that wonderful summary of Judaism’s covenant with God that has called them, and us, back to faithful flourishing for generations – key passage is the SHEMA – love the Lord your God with every dimension of your being
- One of the things that we have been trying to do to nourish souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ here at Brentwood is to find ways to invite people in a conversation about our Memorize and Ponder passages and verses – inserts, invitations to comment on the website, conversations at Bible study, reflection and prayer at home – this week, I set up a Facebook group called ‘Brentwood Ponderers’ – invited 100 people from my various networks to participate – we’ll see how it goes – a few comments this week – pray it will build into a rich conversation about faithful flourishing
- The three key temptations or tests in our times:
 - Bread – physical nourishment – do we see and treat our food as a gift from God? – do we pay attention to how we are nourishing our bodies for service to God’s mission? – do we give thanks for these gifts and treat all who provide them justly? – Jesus = we live fully only in God’s care and by God’s love – how we care for our physical bodies must reflect that reality
 - Political and social power – all the kingdoms of the world – control over them – draw riches from them – exploitation for personal privilege and prosperity – Jesus = worship and loyalty to God means a different way of being together in community – justice and peace – equitable sharing of God’s gifts
 - Religious power and prestige – take a dive to show how the angels will protect you – show us how favoured you are by God – Jesus = don’t test God with silly spectacles – the real test is loving God, loving others, and loving yourself in quiet, ordinary, and resilient ways of being the blessings that God created us to be – and filled with the Spirit, guided by the Spirit, we can do that