

Lent 2 2010
Luke 13:31-35

Last Sunday I talked about Jesus in the wilderness and the temptations of the devil. One of the blessings of being married to Angie is that she helped me see some additional connections in the text to other portions of scripture. For instance, the connection between the “First Adam” in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3 and Jesus as the “Second Adam” in the wilderness temptation in Luke 4. Take a look at your pew Bible. Note the last verse of chapter 3 in Luke. Luke makes the connection between Jesus and Adam abundantly clear by listing the genealogy of Jesus back to “Adam, the son of God” at the end of chapter 3.

The first Adam lived in a perfect garden. The garden was lovely and safe. The wild animals were benign, food abundant and free, no labor required to find it. The climate so temperate that no clothing was required. Truly paradise. There was one tree that was off-limits...the apple tree. The Garden temptation was a seductive apple, the symbol of plenty.

The temptation Jesus faced was in the desert. The desert was hostile and dangerous. In the desert there was no food, no drink. There was danger from wild animals.

Adam & Eve faced the temptation to pamper and take care of the self, to taste forbidden fruit.

Jesus faced the temptation to also “take care of the self” but it was temptation that came after 40 days of hunger and fasting which no doubt would have weakened one’s ability to resist food.

The devil tempted Adam and Eve with the allure of personal power, “you can be wise, know good and evil.”

The devil tempted Jesus with supernatural power to stand above the laws of the universe, (“Throw yourself off the pinnacle of the temple and you will not be harmed. The angels will save you.”)

The devil tempted Adam and Eve with heavenly GLORY. You can “BE LIKE GOD”

The devil tempted Jesus in the desert with earthly glory, when he said, “**All this (the glory of the nations) can be yours if you fall down and worship me.**”

But whereas Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation, Jesus did not.

And so it is that we pick up the story of yet another temptation that Jesus faced when we come to the text for today in chapter 13 of Luke. But now the temptation comes not from the devil but from people like us, religious people and church leaders! (and you thought you were safe in church!) The Pharisees came to Jesus and said, “**You should leave this place and go on your way; Herod is out to kill you.**”

On the surface it would seem that the Pharisees were concerned for Jesus and his welfare. But in reality there was an underlying motive and temptation to their supposed concern for Jesus. The underlying motive was to get rid of Jesus...to get him to leave their territory, to get him out of town. To mitigate his influence on people. How often has the church attempted to blunt the theology of the cross with a theology of glory or a theology of worldly success or a theology of social progress? The temptation was to get Jesus to abandon his course which would lead him to Jerusalem and a cross.

Why would the religions leaders want to get rid of Jesus? Well you have to go back a few verses in order to get the setting of this text. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and he went by way of Perea, the territory east of the Jordan River which was controlled by Herod Antipas. If you have your Bible look at Chapter 13 starting at verse 22.... (Read it thru vs. 30).

²²Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. (he’s on his way to the cross) ²³Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?"

He said to them, ²⁴"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. ²⁵Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.'

"But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'

²⁶"Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'

²⁷"But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'

²⁸"There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. ²⁹People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. ³⁰Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

This is offensive stuff. We all like to think that we have an "in" with God. The world loves to play favorites and we like to believe that God plays favorites too...especially when it comes to dealing with us. We want God to strike down our enemies and protect and save us. We like to think that God is on our side and that we have the inside track on being Christians. Jesus said that God will include in his kingdom some folks that we consider to be undeserving. **"The last will be first and the first last."**

And so the Pharisees replied..."**Get out of here...**" But they didn't have the guts to say it directly so they couched it in a temptation of self-protection..."**Herod is out to get you...so you'd better leave for your own good.**" This is a smooth, well disguised temptation clad in supposed concern for Jesus' welfare. But make no mistake, it was a temptation to get Jesus to abandon the cross to save his own life.

It is a great temptation for us to think that being "religious" is the same as being "faithful". Going through the motions of religious ritual becomes an easy substitute for true faith in God that abandons all attempts to save ourselves by our own devices, be they religious ritual, self-justifying morality or social do-goodism. The temptation is to replace what God does in the cross with something we do. It is no less than to replace God's way with our way.

Now to be sure, Herod, whose full name was Herod Antipas, was a real threat to Jesus. Jesus knew that. Herod, like any despotic ruler, was bent on protecting himself above all things. And Herod Antipas had learned the skill of self-protection from a master, his father Herod the Great. You remember Herod the Great. He was the king who had ordered the slaughter of all male infants under the age of 2 in Bethlehem when he heard of the birth of Jesus. Not an enlightened ruler! Well, Herod Antipas was one of Herod the Great's four sons who inherited his kingdom. Herod Antipas, like his father, was also a despot who followed in his father's murderous ways. He had John the Baptist beheaded for preaching that it was wrong for Herod to marry his brother's wife. Herod would later have Jesus mocked and dressed in an elegant robe and sent to Pilate for crucifixion. To be on the wrong side of

Herod meant serious trouble. The Jews had a saying, “Better to be Herod’s pig than Herod’s son.” Jesus knew that.

And yet how did Jesus reply to those Pharisees who said "Get out of here, Jesus, for Herod wants to kill you."? Jesus answered, "Go tell that fox, Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work..." Jesus does not back down from the temptation and threat. He says, “You think I’m afraid of you? I’m not killing children or beheading prophets. I am casting out demons and performing miracles today, tomorrow and a third day. You want to get me? Here’s my card, you know where to find me.”

Jesus won't back off from his mission. He resisted with the temptation to protect himself, protect his life, protect his safety by running away from trouble. Jesus would not give in to threats or temptation to take the easy way out, to avoid the cup of suffering and the cross.

So after deflecting this temptation to self-protection Jesus went on the offensive. He attacked his audience. He said to the crowd... "You ungrateful hypocrites. You killed the prophets and you stoned those God sent to you... you are always killing the prophets of God." Jesus didn't cut them any slack. But watch! The gospel comes right along behind these harsh words... "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not..."

Jesus will not be put off, put aside. No, he will gather even his enemies and those who would persecute and kill him. This is the gospel. Jesus loves us even when we betray him, dismiss him, attempt to hold him at arms length while we embrace the world and its false promises. Even when we want to kill him, Jesus still loves us and keeps coming to us. As the Bible says, "Though we be faithless, he remains faithful." (2Tim. 2:13)

But there will be a time when grace ends. There will come a time when judgment comes and there will be no place to hide. Those who reject Jesus will be destroyed when the world ends. Jesus is a stone of stumbling and a rock that crushes all who oppose him. And those who reject Jesus will also be rejected. And there will come a time when "Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil 2: 10)

It is Jesus only who was faithful unto death. It is Jesus only who carries us into the Kingdom of Heaven. It is Jesus only in whom your sins are forgiven. It is Jesus who keeps coming at us with his grace calling us to trust him for our life and salvation. Thanks be to God.