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Luke 4: 1-13
"He Chose Us."

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The Temptation of Jesus


⁴Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.' ⁴Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone." '

⁵ Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.'⁸Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." '

⁹ Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you",¹¹and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." '

¹²Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." ' ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

I want you to remember when you were picked by somebody for something and it made you feel special. A time when somebody could have picked somebody else, but they chose you. Maybe it was when your spouse



popped the question, or you said yes, or that cute girl in 9th grade went out with you. Or maybe you were chosen for a special honor at work, or school. Or maybe even you were lucky enough to win the raffle, the drawing, or the door prize!

Yes, there's nothing quite like being chosen. So what if I told you that this passage was all about Jesus choosing you? How so you might ask? Well this passage occurs in Luke immediately after Jesus' baptism, and the text tells us that he is led by the Holy Spirit into the desert, where he is tempted by the devil. And he is given three choices to make. Three incredible temptations, each unique, and each a powerful lure in its own right. And in each case, Jesus could have chosen either for us, or against us, and in each one, he chose us.

Let me explain. First the bread: Jesus has been fasting for 40 days in the desert. Do you know anyone who has fasted for 40 days? I think not. I know a few who have fasted for a day or two, but could you imagine what the temptation of a nice hot freshly baked loaf of bread would be to someone in that situation? Especially for those of us who are hangry after missing merely one meal?

But Jesus says no. And in doing so, he is saying no to the temptation to take power over the material world for his own sake. He is saying no, to exercising his divine right of kingship over creation, and instead choosing to stay hungry. He is choosing to hunger, not to turn the rocks into bread, because he is choosing to be like us; to hunger like us; to thirst like us; to be like us. Instead of pleasing himself with bread he chooses us, because he knows that we do not live on bread alone.

Next he is shown all the kingdoms of the world, and the devil tempts him to take all of their glory and authority for himself. Jesus could have become mightier than Caesar. More powerful than Pharaoh. He could have commanded all the armies of the world to go forth and conquer the nations of the earth, and amassed all the wealth and power of the nations into his own hands. He could have become the greatest king of his time, surpassing Alexander, Julius Caesar, or any other known general.

But he says no, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." Because Jesus didn't come to be a conquering Caesar. He came to be one of us. It's peculiar, isn't it, that Jesus came as carpenter's son? That he was a Jewish commoner in a backwater nation of the world? That he came out a background

that was nothing special, and surrounded himself with followers who were likewise?

And when Jesus chose these things: to be a Jewish carpenter's son, to be an itinerant rabbi, who hung out with fisherman and tax collectors, he was choosing us. He was being Immanuel, "God with us." To be ordinary, and to be human.

And the last temptation, where Satan takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and tempts him to throw himself down trusting that the very angels themselves would swoop in to bear him up from the rocks below. And Jesus says, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test," he again chooses us. Instead of endangering himself in a pointless display of daring, he chooses to stay on the path he's already on. It's the path that takes him from the baptism in the Jordan River, to temptation in the desert, and an even longer path to Jerusalem.

Because, here's where it gets real: Jesus had a mission, and that mission, or calling, or vocation, or whatever you want to call it had a goal. And that goal was cross shaped. And Jesus knew that any of these three temptations: To take power of the material world and fashion stones to bread for his own hunger; to take power over the nations of the earth and create war and empire; and to tempt God to assume the power of God for power's sake, were all deviations from the mission. And that mission was us. To love us. To save us. To rescue us.

The Gospel of John tells us that "God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that whoever believes in him, will not perish, but have eternal life." How do we know this? Because he hungered like we do, thirsted like we do, was cold and bruised like we get, and he even suffered whipping and beating and the cross – things all too human – just like we do.

Even when the thief on the cross taunts Jesus and tells him to call the angels to rescue him and bring him down to safety, Jesus chose us instead. Because he knew that we are in need of redemption. All of us, and all of our conditions: our hungers, our thirsts, our bruises, our whippings, our beatings, and our crosses. And so he chose to assume all of those things for us. To walk our walk. To live our lives. To dwell in and with us. He didn't fake it. He assumed it, and he lived it.

Because Jesus' ministry was cross shaped. And it was cross shaped even in the desert with the devil tempting him. And he never lost sight of us, even then. Instead, he chose us. Thank God for that.

Alleluia and Amen.