

Preached by Carl Rush  
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
Alexandria, VA 22310  
February 21, 2010

Deuteronomy 26:1–11  
Luke 4:1–13

## A LENTEN WALK

It is true that we live in a world which increasingly competes with and even opposes our commitment to the sacred. This text may connect to our lives as closely as any text one can select from scripture. We have Jesus being nudged and tempted in ways that we should be able to understand. He's being tempted to take the easy path rather than wait for the fullness of God's timing. Jesus is tempted to reach for what is immediate rather than what is most deeply satisfying. He is offered that quick fix that has become synonymous with western culture, rather than remain committed to what brings meaning to life.

And we'd do well to become students of this story about temptation. Jesus isn't just being lured into some gratification experience. He's being assaulted. Verbally attacked by the master manipulator. Have you ever felt that quickening of your pulse when you realized someone was trying to manipulate you, and you weren't sure exactly how to respond, but you knew instinctively that someone was trying to control your actions—your response.

Maybe they used accusation, or slander, which are the stock and trade of the tempter. We see this in this passage so clearly. First Peter, Chapter 5, tells us that the devil was prowling around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. We've seen it happen time and again. Maybe it was at a holiday gathering, or recently when families spent a little too much time together during the snow. We've seen it happen when someone at the dinner table loses it. We've witnessed or participated in those times—those encounters—when two people are engaged and someone steps on the other's pride and in a flash there's an eruption. There's a push back with words. As often the case, as soon as the words come out of our mouths we would love to retract them, to have not said them.

Or maybe we've watched as a co-worker self-destructs. The pressure mounts, the challenges, the deadlines on the assignments come due. We've seen it in our families. We've seen it in the workplace. We've seen it all too often this day and age among our young people in school who place way, way too much importance on living to someone else's idea of perfection.

So what do we do when temptation clouds our minds and wears us down to the point of compromising—compromising what God has taught us is the standard of our behavior, compromising the truth that we know, just as Jesus knew, from scripture.

In today's world, success like temptation comes in many forms. You can be the best in your field (and in our part of the country there are a lot of people who are the best in

their fields). You can be the richest you can ever imagine being—far beyond what you would have ever planned—and still we want more. We know that life is a banquet; life is a great feast. But we also know we can only enjoy the bounty of all that we have inherited and all that we have made for ourselves when we allow God's word to be our guide.

God desires that we are faithful so that all these opportunities—all the grand celebrations—are kept in perspective. Otherwise, we quickly lose our way.

How did Jesus manage to resist temptation? He did so by relying on his experience in God's word. It's interesting, isn't it, that Luke and Matthew show Jesus resisting the tempter not with the power of his personality, or even by his ability to debate or by his insulation from the temptation. Jesus resists by simply repeating the words that the Lord had lent to his heart. And we have the same opportunity.

Luther said that temptation is like a bird that is over our head. We can't avoid it, but we can resist allowing that bird to make a nest in our hair. It sounds so easy and so simple, doesn't it? But do we really believe that Christ understood what it was like to be lonely? Do we believe that Christ knew what it was like to be frustrated or discouraged? Christ knew disappointment. And Christ even knew what it was like to be afraid; the same doubts, the same struggles we face in life, Christ lived through, and yet he did not succumb. So when we are praying and asking God for strength, we do well to trust stories like this one in Luke.

We do well to remember that Jesus did not fail God, and Jesus will not fail us. And when those times come, and we are unwilling to remain loyal to our beliefs and our trust in God, when the time comes that we do the opposite of what we've been taught or what we know to be true, and our self worth is eroded, we do well to remember that Jesus, who was victorious in the wilderness, has already proven he will be victorious in us. He will never leave us to our own devices. He stays connected to us in surprising and awesome ways.

Paul knew this when he penned the words in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans: The word is near to you; it's already in your mouth and in your heart for the heart believes, therefore we receive righteousness. And by faith we confess with our mouths and our salvation is confirmed within us once again. Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

God will bless us. If only we will call on him.  
Amen.