

First Sunday in Lent – February 14, 2016, Year C

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 4:1-13

***“Great Co-Mission”***

I think you will agree with me that sometimes it is easy for us to forget that Jesus was a man, a human being, a historical person who actually walked this earth and who did all of the same kinds of things every human being does. Jesus Christ was true man, and true God. He emptied Himself of His supernatural deity, so that He would experience what we experience – yet did not sin. As a man, He felt, He experienced, He encountered all of the emotions, all of the senses, all of the circumstances that we feel in life. Scripture tells us He ate, He drank, He slept, He got dirty, He needed a bath, He prayed, He wept, He gave thanks, and He worshiped. Jesus did and experienced all the things you and I experience in life and yet He still kept on course to carry out the mission that He was sent to do.

It has been said that as far as opportunity goes – it only knocks – but temptation kicks the door in! Jesus experienced temptation - just as you and I are tempted. Can you just imagine what it must have felt like to spend 40 days without anything to eat? I'll just bet you that there are some here this morning that are thinking about what they are going to have for lunch; or what they are going to have for dinner; or possibly a snack in between. Forty days without even a morsel! Jesus had spent forty days with nothing to eat in a hot, dry wilderness that was such an isolated, forsaken place that most people would avoid it whenever possible. I have been to the Judean wilderness. It is a lot of sand and rock, and it is hot! Nothing to eat or drink for forty days! Satan came to Jesus, tempting Him, wanting Him to take the easy way out and by doing so – he was persuading Jesus to avoid His mission – the mission that His Father sent Him to do.

In the first temptation: Satan was asking Jesus to change stones into bread. This temptation really seemed like a good idea, to feed what would most probably have the immediate desire of anyone who was fasting - food! Jesus was being tempted with an instant “want” instead of what a person truly needed. Sure, food would have been really satisfying, but Jesus knew that the world would need so much more than food, they needed His spiritual food; they would need to hear His teaching, not because He enticed them with food, but because He offered them life; eternal life!

And then came the second temptation which was even more dramatic; the devil asked Jesus to worship him, and he would give Jesus authority over all the kingdoms of the earth. Let's get this straight here - the “father of lies” said that he would surrender control and that Jesus would be in charge of every kingdom of the earth! The “father of lies” is trying to tell the King of the Universe “I am going to give you all of this!” Like he just might even turn that over to Jesus, right? He said that Jesus would then be the One who would run every country! All he had to do was acknowledge that the devil had control of the earth, ever since the fall in the Garden of Eden, and then He could change the course of history. But Jesus knew that He would change the course of history in a far more important, personal and dramatic way; He would suffer and die on a cross and then His Heavenly Father would raise Him from the dead,

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defeating the devil's control of this earth, and over sin and death! Jesus was tempted to take the easy way out, to avoid the cross, and then He could make the changes to this world all by Himself, instead of working through His church. Sometimes this temptation is very difficult for us to overcome. Sometimes it is easier to just do things ourselves. Have you ever had the opportunity to teach someone, or show someone how to do something, and while they are doing it – you want to take it out of their hands and do it yourself? You get the sense that they are not doing it “your” way, and you want to take it and say “let ME do it – I’ll show you!” Instead, I think it is best that people learn by doing. Sometimes it is easier to do that than it is to trust - instead of fully trusting God's plan for our lives! Isn't it?

Well if that wasn't enough, the third temptation was the most dramatic, taking Jesus to the top of the Temple, the highest part of the Temple in Jerusalem. The devil told Jesus "*If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here.*" In other words “dive off the temple tower and let God the Father perform a dramatic rescue mission.” This would show that God could be manipulated to do whatever we want and need, at our service – night and day. Such a message would be appealing to huge masses of people who like to hear that God will make us successful and happy – prosperity, if you will. How many like to take the easy way out and have God serve you instead of you serving God. Bargain with God, make deals with Him, you be the boss, and in essence you sell God a bill of goods. How blessed we are that Jesus would have none of that – and instead Jesus' response to Satan was absolutely crystal clear: "*You shall not put the Lord your God to the test!*" You see, nothing was going to make Jesus avoid His mission on our behalf.

You may have heard the story about a little boy in a grocery store. The boy was standing near a delicious open box of peanut butter cookies. "Now then, my boy," said the grocer as he approached the little boy. "What are you up to?" "Nothing," said the boy: "Nothing?" asked the man. "Well it looks to me like you were trying to take a cookie?" "You're wrong, mister. I am trying not to!"

This young boy wrestled with temptation, not just for a cookie, but the temptation to break God's Law. What did we do at the beginning of the service? The Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, you shall not steal! And this little boy gladly decided not to take the *easy* way out. How often do we try to take the easy way out, the one that doesn't seem so bad, but is much easier? And we try to rationalize it saying “oh well you know, I am only human!” But we have got to remember – so was Jesus! So let me ask you:

- Have you ever hoped or dreamed to win a large pile of money, instead of working for it?
- Have you ever tried to make a bargain with God demanding or trying to convince Him that He do things for you? You know – “God, if you get me out of this, I promise I won't do this anymore,” or “I'll go to church every Sunday” or “I promise I'll tithe, I'll do all of the things I am supposed to do!” Things that would most likely help you to avoid the journey that Jesus has called you to take for your life?

The mission that Jesus calls us to follow is a narrow road that is not easy. Jesus asks us to travel the hard road as His follower, because at the end of that road is our final reward: spending eternity with Him. Jesus said *"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."* (Matthew 7:13-14) Jesus never said that following Him would be easy!

If you are being tempted by the devil to take the easy way out, what are you going to do? Will you take the way that requires little effort, or will you follow the example of Jesus and take the way traveled by Him, the way of sacrifice, the way of service, the way of the cross? What was it Jesus said? If you truly love me you must take up your "cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24) That doesn't mean we are going to be crucified, but it means we will follow Him – in a way of service and sacrifice.

Following Jesus' way and not the way of temptation - taking the easy way - means sharing with others what Jesus has done for you. That must have been very very difficult last Sunday for George to stand up before his brothers and sisters in Christ and admit that for a time that he didn't trust God. He didn't trust Him! But when he began to trust Him, putting his full trust in God – God removed the cancer from his body, and he sits before us today cancer free! I believe a result of a supernatural miracle. Believe it or not - in doing this you will have taken on the role of missionary. Now, not everybody has a story like George, but I guarantee you that everyone in this church today has a story, an account of what Jesus has done in your life. Maybe it is a grandchild; maybe it is children; maybe it is a dear friend; maybe it is a church that God has led you to; maybe it is hymn that makes you tear up every time you hear it because you feel Christ being close to you. Sharing what God has done in your life- is a mission. I know what you are thinking – "oh God – don't make me a missionary – I don't want to go to Africa; I don't want to go to the Middle East!" No, that is not the kind of missionary we are talking about. Sharing Jesus with others is NOT taking the easy way out. Jesus has promised salvation to those who believe in Him. In today's second reading – from the tenth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans – the Apostle Paul reminds us that *"That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."*

Please take a moment and think – is God speaking to you today? Will you hear Jesus' words: *"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain."* (John 15:16) Great Words! You know getting the Word out is not all that easy!

Jesus gave the task to all of us saying *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have*

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*commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" (Matthew 28:18-20) This is Jesus gives us our marching orders. He is suggesting that it just may require for some of us to step out of our comfort zone and actually talk to people that we don't know, telling them about what God has done for you and sharing what He might do for them. It might mean that we have to actually invite a friend to church for a Wednesday Night dinner and study, or even for a Sunday Service!

You do not have to do this alone, my friends. Jesus said: "*I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" You see Jesus is promising you that you are NOT in this mission alone! He is in it with you. Some of you might say "oh that is the Great Commission!" I like to say this really should be called the "Great Co-mission, Jesus will never leave you or forsake you! Before He ascended to the Father from the Mount of Olives Jesus said: "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" (Acts 1:8) Don't give in to the temptation to not share Jesus! Jesus is right there with them, and with you, – His Holy Spirit strengthening and protecting you.

I ask you to not take the easy way out, and find excuses why you shouldn't. Jesus needs you on this "co-mission." I close with these powerful words from the Prophet Isaiah: "*Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"*" (Isaiah 6:8)