

**REFLECTION 26TH FEBRUARY 2023,
TEMPTATION AND WILDERNESS EXPERIENCES:**

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Temptation is something that we have all experienced in our lifetime whether as children or adults we have all been challenged with at one time or another. A couple of incidences growing up as a child was being tempted to ride my friends bike down the gully where the creek was and also crossing the huge drain pipe that straddled the creek. Our mum told us time and time again that we must never cross that pipe or ride our bikes down the creek. Being the risk taker that I was, I gave in to temptation and survived to tell the story, but I then had to live with threat of my sister black mailing me with it, she would threat to tell my parents if I didn't do what she wanted me to do.

How do we respond when we are faced with temptation? It isn't always an obvious choice between good and bad, it is the grey areas that we can often find difficult.

In the experience we read in the gospel, Jesus is able to discern what is happening and where the right path, or right response is to each of the temptations.

Richard Rohr reflects, "Most people's daily ethical choices are not between total good and total evil, but between various shades of good, a partial good that is wrongly perceived as an absolute good (because of the self as the central reference point), or even evil that disguises itself as good. These are what get us into trouble."

There are different ways that we see temptation laid out in the gospel story, with something of this grey area of choice being the reality of our lives.

I found this article by Ralph Nyadzi on the internet, I know nothing about him but he attempts to summarise Jesus three temptations into three categories and what does it mean for us as believers if we put it into the context of our own lives? Whether we agree with him or not I thought we could take a look at it.

Firstly, Hedonism

The first temptation of Jesus is about hunger and satisfaction. This temptation is a test of the strength of a person's faith in the face of hunger and want. Can the believer withstand denial of their physiological needs in order to serve God faithfully?

Egoism

If the believer has the opportunity to show off their might will they do so in order to stand tall among people? Or will they rather choose to please God? This is the question at the heart of the second temptation of Jesus.

Materialism

The third temptation is a test of the believer's ability to follow God instead of earthly wealth.

The questions about these temptations are: is Jesus to use whatever powers he possesses to satisfy his own needs, or does he rely for nurture and support on divine grace? Does he dare to think that God's word will suffice? Does Jesus need to prove to himself (and perhaps to others) that God really does care for him in a special way, or is he willing to settle for no public verification, no demonstrable evidence, to validate his distinctive relationship with God? How single minded is Jesus about the vocation given him? Will he compromise

a bit to enjoy the headiness of power and the thrill of control, or is it God alone whom he is to worship and serve?

What emerges from Jesus' response to the tempter's enticements is a clear sense of vocation. In the language and images of Deuteronomy, the picture is painted of who he is and who he is not. He refuses to take things into his own hands, even to gratify an understandable and basic human hunger. His own trust in God does not demand a constant show of power.

Perhaps we can choose to reflect on how the journey through this period of Lent will involve choices every day, that can lead us into temptation, or if not deliver us from an obvious bad decision – at best allow us to choose a better way of living and being that will ultimately help in the work of establishing God's community of love and peace here on earth.

Sometimes when we have been the victims of racism, sexism or discrimination growing up, we may be tempted to deny our true identity for fear of more prejudice. So What happens when our identity is challenged? Perhaps we are tempted to deny our real identity because of our surroundings or who we are with? Perhaps we are faced with choices that can either dignify or diminish another's identity? Maybe we face the temptation to see our identity as more important than another's, either personally or in view of culture or ethnicity?

What happens when we are tempted to use power for our own gain? What might the choices be for us that reflect Jesus being asked to bow down – how might we choose to side with the powerful to the detriment of others, whether close to home, or through the support of a system or practice that is not in tune with God's way of love? How are we, in our day to day living, tempted to find life and meaning in destructive places and practices?

Like I talked about last Sunday we all have our mountaintop experiences in the same way we all have our wilderness experiences. These 40 days of Lent is to test our resolve against temptation, will we choose to be dictated to by our addictions and bad habits or will giving up something during the Lenten season empower us not to give in to temptation?

I understand all about wilderness experiences I spent two years in the wilderness and even though it was a trying time it was also a very empowering time. As humans beings we are biologically, emotionally, spiritually and psychologically made to be in relationship and in the times of the desert we cannot do it by ourselves, no one can. When one is isolated we can be confronted with all sorts of temptations either from sheer hunger and thirst that we begin to see and imagine things and we can begin to think that we are greater and more powerful than we really are. I found that out and that is why it was such an incredible journey for me. Apart from Jesus' personal experience accompanied by the Holy Spirit in the desert I believe that no one can do this work by ourselves. I learnt that everything mattered but nothing was important. What was the most important was myself. I had to learn to put myself first not to worry about what others thought.

Like Jesus in the wilderness not listening to the voices of temptation and not choosing power and dominion or satisfying ones hunger by performing a miracle is the challenge for us. When you are in the wilderness and I'm sure many of you here can probably relate to what I am saying often you do what you can to survive, you don't have many choices to choose from because you are only able to do the very basics in life just to survive. Holding on by a bear thread, keeping your nose just above the waterline like many who survived Cyclone Gabrielle. The wilderness is not just a geographical place but a state of

mind too and often even when we are surrounded by lots of people we can still feel very alone and isolated and in our wilderness times.

This highlights ways in which we can recognise that our way of living and gaining of life/satisfaction etc., should not be to the detriment of others. These tests in the wilderness are preparation for the choices Jesus makes later, as He lives out a ministry of service to others, and of healing. What happens in the wild does not stay there. We can see how it shapes the journey of Jesus' ministry, but how might it manifest itself in the reality of our own context and throughout the journey of Lent?

Jesus' own forty days in the wilderness evoke Israel's forty years of desert wandering between exodus from Egypt and entry into the land of promise.

Remember who you are and from whence you came – just as Jesus did, overcoming the temptations of expediency, renouncing privilege and power in order to be one with the suffering peoples of God. Temptation for Jesus, for the ancient people of Israel, and for us, is about vocation and identity. Who am I, and who am I called to be, and how might I live and act because of who I am and who I have been called to be?

In the narratives about Jesus' temptations we see Jesus being confronted with issues about his vocation. Lent can do that to us too – to reflect upon who I am and how I got to be where I am in terms of my faith as well as the rest of my life; to reflect on who and what it is God calls me to be and do; to identify the choices that I might make now in my life, and then to make them boldly and trustingly; to resist the easy paths of expediency, self-indulgence, success at all costs.

Temptation. We all know about temptation. It's always there. And so is the memory of who we are, and the journey we have had thus far with God, and the possibilities that are before us. As we journey through this wilderness Lenten time, we will be tempted with a lot of challenges. Lent is a time of discernment and reflection and an opportunity to really stand up to the negative forces in our life and choose positivity and life-giving options. Go gently this week. Amen.