

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY MARCH 9 2025

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Temptation”

Based on Luke 4:1-13

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. (v13).

It seems curious that as we enter the Season of Lent, the first place the scholars take us is back to the Temptation of Christ at the very beginning of His ministry. As you may recall, Jesus had just been baptized in the River Jordan, the sky had parted and God's voice from heaven had descended upon those listening, revealing Jesus for the man He really was.

Immediately Jesus left for a time alone:

- To reflect on what the next years of His life would look like,
- To contemplate what would be achieved, along with what would be sacrificed,
- Unwittingly tempted by what this newfound power and authority could give Him, should He so desire.

Would He use it for good? Or would He use it for his own glory.

Of course, it was not as easy to

tempt a man, or a Saviour, when as the scriptures said, Christ was filled with the Holy Spirit.

- Fresh on the trail of ministry,
- Filled with enthusiasm and wonder,
- Holding great expectations in the palm of his hand,
- And few war wounds yet, to show for it.

It was easy (or easier) to stand firm, hold His ground, and keep His vision for the future planted firmly in His mind.

So, the shadows receded, and “left him until an opportune time.” (v13). The trickster was not yet finished with Jesus. The time would come:

- When Christ would be beaten down by the lack of support from those closest to Him,
- When He was at a spiritual low,
- Facing physical harm,
- Betrayed, not just by a disciple, but by politicians and religious authority; those who had also been tempted by power and wealth and had succumbed to the dark abyss of greed.

And so, the darkness bided its time. Then, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when it would seem, all hope was lost, the whispers of evil intent arose once again. In that moment, Jesus said,

“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me...” (Luke 22:42)

This is what real temptation looks like.

And in that dark moment, it is said that,

“An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.” (v43-44)

This is what salvation looks like.

My friends, it is easy to say that as seasoned disciples of Christ, we have avoided, or curtailed the temptations of this world. We throw around words like greed, sex, and power; and exclude ourselves from being vulnerable, because we've got the Bible and we've got Christ. Most of us are not tempted to murder or steal and it becomes rather easy to reassure ourselves

that we are freed from temptation.

But let us remember that the dark one did not find a crack in Christ's armour when the world was spinning right, but in those moments when everything in the world was going wrong. Then, and only then, was there a chance for dark thoughts to take hold, manifest themselves, and breathe life into the embers of the hurts and the wounds and the secrets.

You may not be tempted to murder or to steal, but how often are we tempted:

- To do nothing when we should do something,
- To turn a blind eye instead of righting a wrong,
- To pass the buck when we should take charge,
- To become immune and indifferent to the world's suffering, and claim it's not your problem.
- To hide from the world, rather than living fully in it.

You see, it is not the big moralistic issues that tempt us, but

- The quiet whispers of discontent,
- The refusal to cooperate or compromise,
- The unwillingness to see another's viewpoint,
- A disinterest into leaning into God's plan, claiming you know better.

These are the chinks in our armour. And the darkness waits for those quiet moments within your heart, and begins to fan the flames.

It is said that:

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men [and women] do nothing."

~Attributed to Edmond Burke

Most people are not bad people. But I think we would agree that society has become far more temperamental than it was before COVID. It's not because more people are murdering or stealing. It's because more people have stopped listening, behaving mannerly, courteous or patient.

A small lack of effort makes things tedious, and in time, tempers flare.

Small embers of discontent, fanned by darkness.

The temptation, to not be our very best, emerging in weak moments.

Darkness, smiling at our indifference, our greed, our fear, our loneliness.

We come to the table today, and mark the time for a difficult Lenten Season to begin. We are challenged in these six weeks:

- To contemplate some of the shadows within our soul,
- To put names on the emotions we care not to discuss,
- To accept ourselves fully or more fully.

It is not an easy or welcome journey, and we might be tempted as well, to navigate around it instead, and emerge Easter Morning filled with joy once again.

If you choose to avoid the conversation, you are welcome at this table.

If you choose to embrace the difficult journey, you are welcome at this table.

If you are tempted to feel nothing and stay numb, you are welcome at this table.

For we have a God who understands all these things.

And He has made room for you at His table.

Amen.