



## Sermon by Rev Ross Pearce Highfield Road Uniting Church February 14, 2016

### Luke 4: 1-13

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I once heard an American evangelist being interviewed on a current affairs show; he was almost foaming at the mouth as he railed against the evils of current culture in America and Australia. He said that an overview of Australian culture and media led him to label the whole country, 'Sodom.' There was no way that you could picture this evangelist standing with Jesus as he felt sorry for the people who were like sheep without a shepherd. Such judgemental views mirror those from the Pharisees in the Gospels. This is an image of sin that is fixed on moral and criminal breaches; the wrongs or failures that separate people from God. Some people become so dominated by their view of righteousness, and fixation on sins, that they abandon grace; they abandon love. The story of Jesus enduring the temptations in the wilderness offers a totally different view of sin. The one and only, true sin is to turn your back on God and set yourself to be god of your own life.

Reading the account of Jesus in the wilderness, what strikes is that Jesus wasn't tempted to do anything like what we normally call sin. Jesus wasn't tempted to break the Sabbath or commit murder or lie or steal. He wasn't tempted to commit adultery or covet anything belonging to someone else. All these things are what people focus on as sin and get all upset and uptight about. But it looks very different if you start at the beginning of the Commandments;

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of slavery in Egypt; never have any other god. Never make your own carved idols or statues; never worship them or serve them, because I, the Lord your God, am a God who does not tolerate rivals.

People have skipped over the first commandments and focussed on the others; maybe because they're the visible ones that we can point out and use to accuse people. That's not the Temptations that Jesus went through. Jesus was tempted to turn from loving God and to worship someone else.

And, these temptations are so subtle. With references to scripture, these steps away from the will of God, sound like they are actually following the will of God.

"God is Creator, therefore as the Son of God you should be able to create a meal for yourself"

"God has commanded the angels to care for you, why not have a bit of risky fun"

"As God's son you will inherit all the nations, surely there's no problem in doing it now"

These 3 temptations are all about abandoning the will of God. The strength and subtlety of the temptations that faced Jesus can be seen in the miracles and deeds of His ministry. He was tempted to turn stones to bread for his own hunger and he refused but later he turned water into wine and five loaves into enough to feed 5000. He was tempted to risk his life and he refused but later he risked his life on the cross. That Jesus answered these temptations with scriptural quotes shows not just a rejection of temptation, but a determination to follow the will of God. We don't see the cost of that determination here in the wilderness, but it becomes very real in the Garden before the arrest.

The story of the temptations points to the humanity of Jesus; he was no 'superman' or 'demigod' totally in control but a real man open to temptation. Therein is the relevance of this story to us; the temptation to desert God and run your own life wasn't, and isn't, unique. That temptation is at the very heart of the world's disconnection from God. It is the original and all pervasive sin - to want to be in control of your own life.

In the prayer that Jesus taught the disciples he talks about sin in the sense of how we relate to people - that's what the fifth to tenth commandments are about - but he talks separately about temptation. Not moral slips or criminal acts but about the temptation to turn from God.

The temptation to give into distress and abandon the support of God.

The temptation to give in to fear, and abandon the will of God.

The temptation to give into pride and abandon the grace of God.

The judgemental behaviour seen in some people, like that American evangelist on TV, comes from ignoring the primacy of the commandments of love - "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself".

The truth of the temptations is that if the Son of God needed to stay connected to God, then how much more do we. Stay connected to grace and truth and love and not give into the path of brokenness and pain.