

May my speaking and our thinking ever be acceptable to you O Lord our God.

I have often wondered who said '*Familiarity breeds contempt*'. Our Gospel reading today, telling of how Jesus was tempted by Satan should be very familiar to us and it's just possible that because it is so familiar, it may well have lost the impact and our understanding of God's message to us.

We have now entered another Lenten period, a time when we reflect on why and how Jesus came to his untimely and savage death: if Jesus had to die, then why such a brutal exit? Our journey through Lent will hopefully bring us some understanding of this.

Perhaps we should revisit the temptations set before Jesus by that cunning being, Satan. Satan was and is a past master at temptation, for he continues he trade even now.

In our Old Testament reading from Genesis we read how he successfully tempted Eve who then convinced Adam that the right thing to do was to eat the forbidden fruit, forbidden by God himself; and so from one degree to another Satan continued tempting people until he got to Jesus himself.

Some people may think that Satan is fictitious, but the study bible I use, quite clearly states that he is *real*, a fallen angel and therefore not symbolic. So if Satan is real and God has thrown him out of the Kingdom of Heaven, then maybe he feels he wants to get even with God for such an act. Satan's opportunity comes when God requests of Jesus that Jesus goes to a quiet place to prepare himself for his ministry and eventual death.

The three things that Satan tempts Jesus with are very real even today. We all need food to sustain our bodies, and although Jesus was human, he was also divine, nevertheless, he still needed food. Jesus tells Satan that '*man does not live by bread alone but by the very word given by God,*' and Jesus has come into the world to bring exactly that. Not just the word of God but a whole new way of living and loving in His name.

Having failed here, Satan has another try by asking Jesus to prove he is the Son of God by throwing himself from the mountain thus proving the words from verses 11 and 12 of Psalm 91 *For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.* But again Jesus tells Satan in no uncertain terms where to go and what to do. Only through living our lives to the very best of our ability through the love of God can we hope to be saved and redeemed. Even when we feel everything possible is against us, there is no hope and despair is inevitable, God will lift us up and hold us safe even unto the very end of time. Jesus has promised this and his promise will never be broken.

Finally Satan tempts Jesus with the ultimate, power and wealth, offering him all that he, Jesus, can see, if he will just recognise Satan as all powerful over everything. I have often wondered in my own imagination just how Jesus would have responded to this. Would he have raised his voice? Would he have had a distinct tone of total unbelief in what had been asked of him? Would he have been dismissive of such a ridiculous request? Or would Jesus have actually felt a little sorry for Satan, who has lost everything because he wanted more and more? However Jesus reacted, we will never truly know, what we do know as written in our Bible is that Jesus sent him on his way telling him yet again that it is written, *'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve only him'*. God should be our only Lord and Master. There is no material thing that can even be put in the same league as what God has offered us. God made for us the ultimate sacrifice that of the life of his Son and Jesus' death wasn't to be a clean and tidy death, it was hideous and painful, revolting and condemning but the outcome was everlasting life for those who dared to be tempted to follow Him.

PAUSE

Satan and temptation, they seem to go together like so many other couplets. But I also feel that not all temptation is bad, just think if you had never been tempted to try something different to eat, you may never have known whether you liked it or not. There are numerous occasions where temptation can be for the good. Tempted to come to church, tempted to help someone, tempted to go and enjoy yourselves, enjoyment is not a sin, it's a gift from God. There is good and bad temptation and we with what we call our conscience know the difference between right and wrong, and this is just what Jesus demonstrated but on a huge scale.

Just think where we would be if when Jesus called his first disciples they resisted the temptation to try something new and didn't follow him. Where would we be now? *Slight pause*

Jesus offered them something they knew nothing about, they were even told to leave their homes and families, surely the temptation there would have been to stay with what you know and carry on in the same old way, perhaps often wishing you had had the courage to try something new.

It's very tempting to stay as we are, perhaps it's the safe option. But if we didn't venture into change, then would we have progressed from the solid wheel to the spoked wheel? Would we have progressed from eating raw foods to the pleasure of eating hot food cooked over a fire? Or even worse, would we ever have taken notice of the disciples thus denying ourselves the knowledge and love of God through his Son, Jesus Christ.

We could have been tempted to stay the same, not venturing to try anything new, and that could have been Satan at work, Satan being afraid that if we tried something different he would lose out and not be able to have his influence on the world.

So we have good temptation and bad temptation.

Our community here at St Luke is embarking on a new journey and we have through this Lent a time to prepare ourselves to receive our new priest. We can be tempted to reject her or we can listen to what God is saying to us and receive her with open and loving arms. We are at a crossroads where good temptation meets bad temptation and if we really want our community here to flourish and to go from strength to strength, continuing the good work that Richard started, then maybe we need to open our hearts and listen to God and give her the support that God is asking of us.

We have a wonderful opportunity of revealing to God just how much we love him by listening to him and following his teachings as far as is possible to the letter. We are entering a new and exciting phase of this church's life and it is in our hands to make it succeed taking this community on to future generations.

Where would we have been if the first disciples had taken the easy option and not been tempted to change their way of thought? Life through time changes, Jesus brought to us probably the biggest change of all, where all people are equal in the eyes of God and each and every one of us has something to bring to God's world, regardless of gender.

As we prepare ourselves to enter into probably the most painful week of our Christian year, let us also prepare ourselves for the joy that God has given us through everlasting life in the resurrection of his Son our Saviour on that first Easter Day and let us furthermore rejoice that God has sent another servant as our priest, to guide us along our spiritual journey, a journey that we can make together, share it's ups and downs, it's laughter and it's tears, but most importantly knowing that we put our hand in the hand of God as He takes us along another road.

With God's help and the guidance of our new priest Sally, this church and community of St Luke can only go from strength to strength if we are brave enough to try a good temptation.

Amen