

The Devil Tests Jesus

The story of Jesus' temptation or **testing** (Luke 4:1-12) is traditionally associated with the season of Lent and with Lenten disciplines. "Discipline" and "disciple" are closely related words. To be a "disciple" is to adopt a "discipline," a way of life. After Jesus' baptism he went from Galilee with its green hills and big lake into the barren, hot Judean wilderness to be formed as a "disciple" of God. It was a time of prayer and spiritual discipline. This Lent, we at Grace are invited to go into the wilderness spiritually, and enter into a time of formation as disciples of Jesus.

The key word in Luke's story of Jesus' spiritual formation in the wilderness is the Greek word *peirazo*, which means "to tempt or test." Testing is what you do in schools and in labs. You test yourself to find out how much you know and you test things to find out what is in them. The disciplines of Lent are intended to enable you to test yourself to find out what is in you. One dimension of that testing is to find out how many of God's words are in your heart.

The source of Jesus' power to resist the devil's tests is directly related to his knowing the stories of God by heart. It is what Jesus knows by heart from Deuteronomy that is his greatest source of strength in resisting temptation and passing the tests. The most striking thing about Jesus is his spiritual strength, which comes from his internalization of the experiences of Israel with God in the wilderness that are recorded in the book of Deuteronomy.

Not eating for forty days was Jesus' first test. He fasted for **forty days**. Then he was hungry. Satan—the spirit that leads us away from God—suggested that he turn stones into bread. But Jesus remembered the words of Moses to the people of Israel about their experience in the wilderness for **forty years**. And so he withstood that first temptation; he passed the first test:

*The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God,
command this stone to become a loaf of bread."
Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"*

In Deuteronomy 8:1-10, Moses is talking to the people of Israel about what they will do when they live in the new land in a time of prosperity with plenty of bread to eat. Their temptation will be to forget God. So Moses counsels them to remember the source of life:

*He [God] humbled you by letting you hunger,
then by feeding you with manna,
with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted,
in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."*

So when Jesus said to Satan after the invitation to turn the stones into bread—"one does not live by bread alone"—he was remembering this whole section of

Deuteronomy and in particular, the statement, “one does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

As I am writing this, Amelia brought me a beautiful breakfast: an asparagus and cheese omelet with a glass of V8 juice and a cup of tea. I love asparagus and cheese omelets. I imagine Moses saying, “One does not live by bread alone, but by asparagus and cheese omelets.” Okay, probably not. Moses’ focus was that we do not live by bread alone but by the words of God. our Lenten discipline will concentrate on writing the words of God on our hearts.

Suggestions for discipleship formation this week

You might:

- ❖ Read Luke 4:3 out loud, as many as three times a day, and read the whole story once a day. Each time read it with a different volume, speed or tone of voice. After some days, try saying it by heart, at least the parts in bold print:

*The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God,
command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”
Jesus answered him, “**It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’**”*

- ❖ What’s your favorite comfort food? If Tom would say “I don’t live by bread alone, but by asparagus and cheese omelets,” how would you fill in the blank: “I don’t live by bread alone, but by _____.”
- ❖ Read Deuteronomy 8:1-10 out loud, remembering that these were the words going through Jesus’ mind as he sat on a rock in the Judean wilderness. Imagine yourself there in the wilderness and remember all of the manna God has given you in your life—the places where you have had shelter, the fruit and vegetables you have had to eat.
- ❖ Fast for a morning or a whole day and meditate on Deuteronomy 8:3. The hunger will help to focus your attention. That’s what Jesus did in the wilderness. He remembered the words of God and the hunger helped him focus his attention on those words.

In what ways are you currently being tested?
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- ❖ Find Deut. 6 in your Bible and read it out loud. Notice the parts Jesus recalled in his time of testing: “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve,” and “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”
When you read Deut. 6 aloud, notice that it includes the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-9): “Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.” Another translation of this is: “**Write** these words that I am commanding you today **on** your heart.” Write the words of God on your heart so that you will have them for the times of testing in your life.

Luke 4:1-12

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Deuteronomy 8:1-10

This entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe, so that you may live and increase, and go in and occupy the land that the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. The clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the Lord your God disciplines you. Therefore keep the commandments of the Lord your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you.