
Resisting Temptation

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 16 March 2025

Genesis 15:1-7,18 • Luke 13:31-35



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is visited by a small group of Pharisees. They have come with a message: King Herod wants to kill you, so you'd better get out of town. It's an interesting message, since Herod actually had wanted to meet Jesus, after hearing about some of the things Jesus has done. Herod has already had John the Baptist killed, although he was reluctant to do so, and it was only his wife's scheming and Herod's own rashness that sealed John's fate. Herod enjoyed listening to John, even as John railed against Herod marrying his brother's wife. And after he has John killed, he begins to hear about what Jesus is doing.

But his interest in Jesus turns to fear, as Jesus seems to be stirring things up, and Herod doesn't want any trouble in his kingdom. So he makes it known that he wants Jesus dead.

God works in mysterious ways, it is said. Satan also works in mysterious ways, but for evil purposes. We heard last week about Satan tempting Jesus, when Jesus was at the very beginning of his ministry. Satan tempted him with food when Jesus was hungry; with power, when Jesus was living the life of a poor man; and with going against his Father's will, when Jesus had been sent by God to do God's will. Jesus resisted all this temptation and remained true to his mission, and to his Father. He remained pure, without sin, and proceeded to build his ministry on earth.

Now, Satan is trying another tack: he has surely influenced Herod to seek to capture and kill Jesus, to keep him from continuing to disrupt the peace in the kingdom. It is a subtle attack. The warning is brought to Jesus by other Jews, and is couched in terms which could be considered a friendly warning. Perhaps the Pharisees who bring the message are truly concerned about Jesus' safety — or maybe they have their own reasons for wanting Jesus out of the way, as Jesus is a threat to their power too. Perhaps the threat is real, perhaps it is not: it is not clear. But it is surely a temptation to Jesus. He could leave town, give up his ministry, and avoid trouble or personal harm — or death. It would be so much easier just to give up.

But of course Jesus does not give up. He responds to the threat and the temptation with defiance: he will continue to do exactly what he is doing. He will continue to preach and teach, to lead his disciples, and eventually make his way to Jerusalem to meet the fate his Father has ordained. Satan has failed again to divert Jesus from his path. Jesus will face other temptations on his way to the cross, some from his own disciples: think of Peter telling Jesus that he must not face trial and be killed, to which Jesus replied, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" (Matthew 16:23). Or when Jesus' family comes to take him home, and he replies that his disciples are his family: his mother and brothers (Matt 12:49). In the face of all these temptations to quit his task, Jesus remains strong and pure.

It's interesting that Jesus tells the Pharisees that he is

‘driving out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I shall finish my work.’ Yet I must be on my way today, tomorrow, and the next day. (Luke 13:32-33)

Does this sound familiar? Surely it is a reference to, or a foreshadowing of, the three days of his death and then his rising again. Today and tomorrow he will continue to travel and preach, ending up in Jerusalem for his trial and crucifixion; and on the third day he will rise again, thereby finishing his work

and returning to his Father. The pattern of threes continues: three temptations in the desert, three days of work, three days when he is dead, until his resurrection.

Jesus says he “must be on his way today, tomorrow and the next day.” He must go to Jerusalem, for that is where the seat of government is, and his trial can take place. In a rare moment of reflection, Jesus laments that his own people, who as John says “did not recognise him” or receive him (John 1:10-11), would not let him gather them up “as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings” (Luke 13:34). Jesus wants so much to love and care for his people, but so many of them resist and repel him. To them, he is just another prophet, and what happens to prophets, especially in Jerusalem? They are stoned and killed. The people do not like to have anyone tell them they are sinning. They do not realise that the way of Jesus is the way of love and peace, and so they turn away from him. And so Jesus’ prediction come true, and he suffers terrible abuse at the hands of the crowds, who first welcome him, and then turn on him.

All of this comes about through Jesus choosing to obey his Father and complete his mission of love. In spite of all risk, in spite of all the temptation Satan puts in his way, Jesus carries on until the end. And because he does, all of us who put our faith in him receive the Holy Spirit and the promise of life eternal. Thanks be to God. Amen.