

6-12 March 2022 Luke 4: 1-13

With an open hand

Read the passage from Luke. It is written below.

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.

Bible notes

It is sometimes said that the people most likely to abuse their power are those who are unsure whether they have any – people who assert themselves just to prove a point, or who feel so inferior that they must dominate others at all times for fear of being slighted themselves. It is interesting to read the account of Jesus' temptations as a struggle to come to terms with his power and to find the wisest way to use it. Jesus is confronted with real questions and temptations. There are no easy conclusions here – in a few verses we have the summary of many days of difficulty. The devil's insidious 'If you are the Son of God' (v.3) sounds like a goad to self-justifying action. The offer of a partnership deal – 'If you will worship me, it will all be yours' (v.7) – sounds just like the kind of shortcut to high status offered to talented young people, as long as they refrain from rocking the boat. The temptation for Jesus to throw himself off the pinnacle of the Temple (and be miraculously rescued by angels) would certainly have been a supernatural way to avoid the reality of being human. All the temptations seem to be about using power to gain instant results. They all assume that 'Son of God' is an instrumental title, a way to leverage power, rather than a relationship expressing intimacy and shared character. They imply 'Son of' as in 'Son and Heir' rather than 'Son of' in the sense of 'just like his

father'. It could be that these refusals by Jesus helped him to clarify the mission that he was actually accepting. It is after this that he returns to Galilee and begins his ministry, asserting that God has anointed him to bring good news to the poor.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

Let's think about power and how we use it. It really does take some thinking about. Jesus took 40 days in the wilderness to do this. Many of us have probably felt the pain of feeling powerless and it can be a serious problem. But what we do with the power we have is also a serious issue – power to harm or to heal, or to lift someone else up or to put them down? Jesus made far-reaching decisions in the wilderness: not to go for the quick fix, not to use who he was to grasp at power. These were important 'nos', leading to the fullness of his 'yes' to serve God.

Questions for reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week's Bible passage.



Questions

- What do you think is the story behind this image – how is it made?
- What is the ‘bigger story’ in which you live your life?
- What place do God’s plans have in your choices and decisions?

Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

A prayer of commitment

Living God,
creator and sustainer of the world,
we pledge to live well and with humility, in harmony with your creation;
we pledge to look to your Son for truth and guidance;
we pledge to make time for prayer and to be open to your Holy Spirit;
we pledge to read your Word,
and to be guided by the example of your Son.
We give you our lives to be transformed
as we praise and adore you,
and we thank you for your love.
Amen.

A prayer to end the Bible study

Lord Jesus,
may we see you more clearly,
love you more dearly
and follow you more nearly
day by day.
Amen.