

Breaking Open the Word

Lent 1 C

9th March, 2025



Resisting Complacency: Adhering to Our Divine Calling

A weekly reflection and
sermon, with study and
prayer guides following the
RCL Lectionary

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Revised Common Lectionary Lent 1 C

Deuteronomy 26.1-11

Psalms 91.1-2, 9-16*

Romans 10.8b-13

Luke 4.1-13

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collect

Introduction

Reflection

Discussion Questions

Five Days of Meditation and Prayer

O Lord,
who for our sake didst fast forty days and forty nights:
Give us grace to use such abstinence,
that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit,
we may ever obey thy godly motions
in righteousness and true holiness,
to thy honour and glory: who livest
and reignest with the Father
and the Holy Ghost,
one God, world without end..

INTRODUCTION

This reflection, titled "Resisting Complacency: Adhering to Our Divine Calling," explores the theme of temptation through Jesus' experience in the wilderness. It highlights that just as Jesus faced various temptations designed to divert him from his mission, we, too, confront distractions in our daily lives that can lead us away from our faith.

The sermon shares personal anecdotes and notes how modern society offers numerous alternatives to traditional church attendance, reflecting a decline in the community's reliance on faith.

While it is easy to blame external factors for this shift, the responsibility ultimately lies with individuals to remain committed to God's word. The message is deepened by drawing parallels between Jesus' steadfastness

in temptation and the faithfulness shown by Israel during their wilderness journey.

Jesus emphasises trust in God's provision, a servant's attitude, and unwavering fidelity to Scripture as essential principles for resisting distractions.

Citing the significance of Jesus' triumph over temptation as the foundation for his public ministry, the congregation is asked to embody this resilience in their lives, particularly throughout Lent.

In conclusion, we are encouraged to follow Jesus' example of unwavering faith and commitment to God's truth as we navigate their challenges and distractions.

Prayer Prompts

Pray for the courage to live out your faith boldly in your daily interactions this week.

Think about ways to express love and kindness to those around you, especially those who may not expect it.

You can ask for guidance to identify opportunities for service within your community and how to act on them.

Consider praying for personal growth in your relationship with God, seeking ways to deepen your understanding of His word.

God of Creation, breathe into us, made of clay,
your gift of life so that we, made in your image
may become your eyes, ears, hands and voice.

Resisting Complacency: Adhering to Our Divine Calling

Today, we reflect on a critical chapter in Jesus' life: the temptation in the wilderness. This story showcases Jesus' triumph over the tempter. It resonates with our battles against distractions that can lead us off our path of faith.

During the week, I shared with some of our groups a story from my former Vice Principal, who, when I was in the Parish of Burnie, was our Parish Council chair. Yes, they do things a bit differently over there! Joan lamented how her brother's family had refused to go to Church with her when visiting from Melbourne. When asked why, her family indicated that they were now in the position of community that they were enjoying; they didn't need the Church to socialise or share their journey.

Joan was perplexed by this, and an interesting conversation began. Since the advent of "Divine Worship" on the radio, and some may even recall the weekly ABC televising of a service from somewhere in the country at 11 am, soon to be replaced by "Songs and Praises", physical attendance became optional. On the rare occasions I get a Sunday off, I often feel I am in a different world

when I venture out on a Sunday morning. The streets are alive with the cafe scene. Today, a Farmers Market is in full swing in the square. We're in between times in the sporting world, but soon, AusKick or its successor will be dominant again; there was cricket and little athletics, netball, tennis, and so on. Or, there was extra time in bed on Sunday morning to sleep off a pleasant Saturday night.

There is hardly a Sunday school to send the children to for a child-free time, and our world looks very different. We can lament or even look back at what was, but over the twentieth century, the place of the Church and faith in the community has declined. Some worshipping communities have tried different ways of presenting worship. I remember once being addressed by the community that used to worship at the Forum in Melbourne. They claimed the theatre was packed weekly, and at least 200 new people were always attending. I was on the receiving end of a glare from Dick, Head of Theology, when I asked the question as to where did the other 200 go?

Community expectations vary, but we deceive ourselves if we believe that distractions and alternatives keep the community away from our

doors. If we assume that the community of the East Gippsland shire is currently not at home but drawn into alternative activities, we misjudge the situation. It's easy to blame the Rector for the worship style, the choice of hymns, or the strong views of a few vocal individuals. Still, the reality is that, in marketing terms, it may not be the product they need for many people.

We miss the mark when using St. Paul's well-deployed archery term about sin. The need for quiet meditation, teaching about the scriptures, and communion at the table, coupled with the disappointment with the Church's past failures in justice and mercy, makes it easy to be tempted by things contrary to our very point of being here.

Today, as we begin our Lenten Sunday journeys, we do so with Jesus's temptations. The tester, be it "the Devil" or "Satan," is used figuratively in the texts. Still, to misattribute Mark Twain, many of the temptations and excuses of this modern day rhyme with those of the past, even in Jesus's time.

As we examine today's readings more closely, I want to address the nature of "the tempter." Satan, or the Devil, is personified as the one who tempts us. We first encounter the concept of Satan in the Book of Job. In the account of Jesus' time in the wilderness, as found in Luke, the personification of temptation is more straightforward

to grasp as a dialogue between two individuals. Saying, "The devil made me do it," is never a reasonable excuse. One thing must be clearly understood in the Garden of Eden, the wilderness, or the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Our ultimate adherence to God's word is not the fault of temptation; it is our responsibility if we choose otherwise. We may be predestined by creation to be in the entire presence of God forever. Still, the reality is this: we can choose to remain on the path or to go another way.

Some may remember the great South African cricket captain Hansie Cronje. Cronje has always been a true cricket hero and leader. Unfortunately, he was found guilty of match-fixing, which cost him his career and tarnished his reputation and, ultimately, his life as he grappled with the consequences. In the trials that followed, his legal defence claimed, "The Devil made me do it." Evil holds no power unless you allow it to control you. The word 'demon' derives from the Greek word 'δαιμονος,' meaning power. Where your allegiance and heart lie, there your soul is destined. If you permit evil to occur, it is by our own choice, individually or as a community. Today, we observe that Jesus was tempted at this point in his ministry, yet he did not sin.

The Temptation of Jesus (Luke 4:1-15)

Following his baptism, Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, was driven into a forty-day fast and prayerful solitude in the wilderness. During this arduous journey, he was presented with three alluring propositions. Had Jesus said 'Yes' to any of them, each proposition seemingly was designed to divert Jesus from his mission or take a shortcut that would spare him from 'the time of trial.'. The temptations sought to distract him from his unwavering reliance on God's unshakable provision (verses 3-4). You're hungry, and you have the power to change the rocks into food. You don't need to wander around without food.

He was then tempted to stray from humility (verses 5-8). 'Do you see all this?' The wilderness was not merely a desert; it represented the ability to save the world while evading the time of trial. From his steadfast commitment to the Father (verses 9-12), Jesus resisted these temptations, firmly anchoring himself in the divine word.

A Parallel with Israel's Exodus (Deuteronomy 26:1-11)

This episode is a lot like Israel's time in the wilderness. In Deuteronomy 26:1-11, there's a reminder about how God always provides and stays faithful. While Israel had a tough time trusting God, Jesus stayed strong. The first fruit offering in Deuteronomy shows how important it is to recognise God as the one who provides everything we need. On the flip side, the tempter tries to get Jesus to ignore God's provision and take matters into his own hands.

Faithfulness in Mission (Romans 10:4-13)

Paul's rebuke in Romans 10 underscores the centrality of faith in achieving salvation, exemplified by Jesus' unwavering commitment to God's plan. Unlike Jesus' experience in the wilderness, we are called to trust God's providence and resist the allure of comfort, power, or societal approval.

The Mission to Proclaim the Gospel

Our mission as the Church is to share Christ's message. However, we are constantly beset by distractions—concerns about material success, the pursuit of status, or even the temptation to compromise our faith for societal approval. Jesus' exemplary behaviour teaches us that maintaining faith requires a deep understanding and steadfast commitment to God's Word.

Applying the Principle: Recognising and Resisting Distractions

1. ***Trust in Divine Provision:*** We must shift our focus from merely relying on our abilities and fully commit to trusting God to meet all our needs.

2. ***Adopt a Servant's Attitude*** Jesus' example inspires us to see Jesus seeking power and personal gain. *****Trust in Divine Provision:***** It's essential to shift our focus from relying solely on our abilities to the conviction that God will meet all our tempter's

3. ***Unwavering Fidelity to God's Word:*** We must remain steadfast against the tempter's attempt to distort Scripture. Like Jesus, we must understand and boldly apply God's truth with clarity and conviction.

Trust in Divine Provision:

Let's shift our focus from solely relying on our abilities to fully embracing trusting God to meet all our needs.

And the last thing to note in the account is this one point. We may come through the temptations on offer now, but temptation will still exist. In the old form of the Lord's prayer, we prayed, "Lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil." Being born again does not insure against the "devil and all that is false and unjust." The tempter left him to return at another opportune time.

Conclusion

You may well be able to say that Jesus was victorious in the wilderness; Jesus commences His public ministry with authority. His example inspires us to remain steadfast by resisting distractions, trusting God, and unwaveringly adhering to His Word. As we traverse Lent and beyond, may we, like our Lord, be found resilient and, most importantly, faithful. Amen.

Discussion Questions

What common distractions pull you away from your faith or spiritual commitments?

- The sermon discussed how distractions, like social activities or comfort, can lead people away from attending church and connecting with their faith.
- Can you think of a time when you chose a distraction over your spiritual commitments?
- What did you learn from that experience?

How does the example of Jesus resisting temptation in the wilderness encourage you to face your distractions?

- The sermon highlighted how Jesus faced temptations and remained faithful, showing that it's possible to resist distractions with God's help
- What specific strategies can you apply to better resist distractions like Jesus did?

In what ways do you see the idea of community, as discussed in the sermon, influencing people's attendance in church today?

- The sermon shared a story about how some people feel they do not need the church for community or socialising, reflecting a change in values over time.
- How can you encourage others to appreciate the community aspect of the church beyond just the social activities?

Why do you think trusting in God's provision is essential rather than relying solely on our abilities?

- The sermon emphasised that Jesus trusted God to meet His needs, even when tempted to take shortcuts.
- Can you identify a situation where trusting in God rather than solely in yourself made a difference?
- What was that experience like?

What might it mean to have 'unwavering fidelity to God's Word' in your daily life?

- The sermon encouraged listening to and applying God's truths to resist the temptations we face, much like Jesus did.
- How can you habitually ground yourself in God's Word to help withstand distractions and temptations in your own life?

Thoughts for Younger Minds

What distractions make it difficult for you to focus on God?

- This question addresses how modern distractions can divert us from faith and community.

Why did Jesus choose to fast and pray in the wilderness?

- This relates to the trials Jesus faced as he prepared for his ministry.

Can you remember a time when you were tempted to do something wrong? How did you resist?

- This highlights the importance of taking personal responsibility in overcoming temptation, similar to Jesus's experience.

What does it mean to trust in God's provision?

- This emphasises the need to recognise and depend on God's support in our lives.

How can we incorporate Jesus' example of resisting temptation into our daily lives?

- This is about imitating Jesus's determination against the temptations he encountered in the wilderness.

Walking Gently on Sacred Ground

Five-Day Devotion

This five-day devotional will be taking a deeper dive into the sermon from this weekend.



Day 1

Luke 4:1-15

As we begin this journey through Jesus' temptations, we are invited to reflect on his strength in the face of distraction. Jesus' time in the wilderness reveals the significance of unwavering commitment and trust in God's provision. The voice of temptation often whispers in our ears, urging us to seek immediate gratification over spiritual fulfilment.

Just like Jesus, we must confront our inner distractions and remember the calling that God has placed upon our lives.

This first day reminds us that trusting God's promises is essential for our faith journey. Reflecting on our daily lives, we can identify areas where we seek comfort, power, or approval instead of deepening our relationship with God.

Let us draw strength from Jesus' example and persevere through the distractions that await our attention.

- What distractions are currently pulling you away from God's purpose for your life?
- How can you better rely on God's provision during challenging times?
- In what areas of your life do you find it difficult to resist temptation?
- Pray for clarity and focus as you navigate distractions in your life.
- Ask God to help you identify temptations and give you the strength to resist them.

Day 2

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

This day, we reflect on God's provision and faithfulness. The Israelites' journey through the wilderness was fraught with challenges, yet God remained their sustainer. Similarly, we are reminded that God is our ultimate provider no matter the trials we face. Offering the first fruits illustrates gratitude and recognition of God's continuous blessings. It prompts us not to take for granted what God has provided.

- How can you make a habit of recognising and thanking God for his provision in your life?
- What areas of your life do you need to invite God's provision more fully?
- In what ways have you seen God's faithfulness manifest in your journey?

Take a moment to express your gratitude to God for his provisions.
Ask for guidance on remaining steadfast in faith during times of need.

Day 3 Romans 10:4-13

In today's reading, Paul emphasises the necessity of faith in achieving salvation through Christ. Just as Jesus invited his followers to trust God's word against temptation, we are encouraged to keep faith at the forefront of our lives. This faith is not merely belief; it's actionable trust that propels us to live out our convictions, even in adversity. We often encounter societal pressures that encourage compromise, but true faith equips us to withstand such challenges.

As we reflect on the call to proclaim the Gospel, we are reminded that our faith sustains us through trials. Just as Jesus remained steadfast in His mission, we are called to resist distractions and stay grounded in the truth of God's word. Remember, our actions reflect our faith, and it's through faith that we can endure every temptation to deviate from what God has asked of us.

- What distractions are challenging your faith journey right now?
- How does your faith manifest in your everyday life?
- Where do you feel called to proclaim the Gospel in your community?

Pray for strength to remain faithful amid distractions.
Please take a moment to seek wisdom on how to share your faith with others boldly.

Day 4 Matthew 6:9-13

As we pray the Lord's Prayer, especially the line that asks, "Lead us not into temptation," we are reminded of our need for divine guidance. All believers face temptations that can divert them from their calling, but prayer allows us to access divine strength. Praying is a powerful weapon against distractions and the overwhelming power of temptation. We must

acknowledge that while temptations are inevitable, we can rely on God to lead us safely through them.

Through our prayers, we can warmly invite God into our struggles through our prayers, asking for his loving support when we face temptations. Jesus beautifully showed us this in the wilderness, always turning to God during challenging moments. By immersing ourselves in prayer, we open up a special connection with God, helping us stay grounded in his truth and steer clear of distractions.

- How often do you bring your temptations and struggles to God in prayer?
- What distractions have you allowed to take precedence over prayer?
- In what ways can your prayer life strengthen your resistance to temptation?

Pray for awareness of distractions that hinder your prayer life.
Ask God for protection against the temptations you face daily.

Day 5 Hebrews 12:1-2

As we close this devotional journey, we are reminded to run the race marked out for us with perseverance, fixing our eyes on Jesus. Just as Jesus triumphed over temptation, we are called to maintain our focus on him. It is through the endurance of challenges and the act of resisting distraction that our faith is refined and made more substantial. Maintaining our commitment to God's word strengthens our ability to navigate life's temptations.

Each day, we are presented with choices that can either draw us closer to God or lead us away from Him. By adhering to his Word and remaining steadfast in our mission, we honour the calling He has placed in our lives. Let us go forth, equipped with the lessons learned during this devotional, to embrace our faith journey with courage and resilience fully.

- What do you think about the lessons learned from Jesus' temptations?
- How can you apply the principles of this devotional going forward?
- What distractions do you need to guard against actively in the coming days?

Pray for the strength to remain focused on Jesus in the trials ahead. Seek God's guidance for ongoing growth in your faith journey.

End notes and further reading

Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke (St Paul's Press)
 The Gospel of Matthew
 The Gospel of John

Tannehill, Robert C, **Narrative Unity Luke Acts Vol: A Literary Interpretation: Volume One: The Gospel According to Luke:**, Augsburg Fortress Publishers 199

N.T. Wright

Andrew's Version: <https://substack.com/@abmcg>

Bible Hub etc



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Prepared by Rev'd Dennis Webster, Rector of the Anglican Parish of Paynesville,
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Acknowledgement of use appreciated

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Published every weekend, usually on Saturday evening, AEST.

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