Matthew 4: 1-11 - We live by every word that comes from the mouth of God

March 5, 2017

GOD INVITES AND WE COME TO REST

Reflection with organ and choir:

Vonkk 198 Let us bow before the Lord

Song 384 Jesus, O remember me

"It is written: 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' (Matt. 4: 4).

Votum and Benediction

Welcoming

Praise

Song 393: 1,4 Centre of our desire, you bring peace to our minds – stand

Song 396 Behold the Saviour see the cross - Heavenly Prince, despised, reviled – stand

Thanksgiving

Vonkk 194:1,2,5 - Choir Were you there when they crucified the Lord?

GOD SPEAKS TO US AND WE LISTEN

Holy Communion

Discussion and reflection on the meaning of the Eucharist:

- What does Holy Communion make you think about?
- What does Holy Communion promise you?
- What hope does Holy Communion give you?

Preparation for the table

Song 387: 1,4 choir verse 2 O Lord, from blood and wounds from tree of hatred and scorn – sit

Celebration of the Eucharist

Children to catechesis

Prayer

Bible reading
Today I want to talk to you about **temptation**.

But, I do not so much want to talk about **ordinary temptations**. And you can think of anything you struggle with on a daily basis. What you see, what you do, what you think, with whom you do it and where you do it. And it would have to do with the three core temptations of the Christian life: moral issues, greed and power. And I could say a lot about it, but I’m not going to.

I could also talk about the temptation today in a *post-truth* society where people deliberately work with half-truths, not with outright lies but partly false and partly true convictions. You can get away easily if you get caught, because you can just say you were misquoted. As Oscar Wilde once said, it is the imaginative among us who come far, but if you cannot lie well, then tell the truth. We see it play out in the media and in politics. You can almost believe nothing anymore if you do not do your own research and try to get at the bottom of things.

But I do not want to talk about normal temptations. I do not want to talk about the media and politics. **I want to talk about your life with God.** I want to talk about the fact that your biggest challenge is to follow the Lord in everything you do and think … or not. I want to talk about the temptation of disbelief and disobedience instead of confidence and perseverance on the path that God shows you.

I want to talk about the challenges facing you on the road with God. It many times includes solitude in the wilderness where you have to decide whether you are going to walk with the Lord, even if there is no support, only you and your faith in the Lord.

I want to give you solid food for the life you have to walk with God, so that it doesn’t later turn out that you got lost in disbelief and disobedience and were left behind. That you forsook that which is most precious to you, your faith in God.

Apostasy is a great danger if you do not deliberately train yourself in faith and obedience.

And I want to use the best example as motivation, the example of the Lord Jesus, when the Spirit led Him into the wilderness to be tempted.

**Matthew 4:1-11**

1Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

4Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

5Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6“If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“‘He will command his angels concerning you,

and they will lift you up in their hands,

so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”
Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Jesus was made strong by temptations

Jesus had just had a wonderful experience in which he was baptized. The Holy Spirit descended upon him, and God spoke from heaven that Jesus is his beloved Son.

But, Jesus gets almost no time to enjoy the experience. He is immediately introduced by the same Spirit to the wilderness, to be tempted by the devil, the tempter, also called Satan, his opponent.

Why? Because the Spirit's first goal with Jesus, after he came down on Him, was to make Jesus strong for the challenges that awaited him in his ministry. "Jesus must face these temptations now, and win at least an initial victory over them. If he doesn’t, they will meet him suddenly, in the middle of his work, and they may overwhelm him." (NT Wright - Matthew for Everyone).

Matthew tells the story of Jesus' temptation as an important introduction to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Shortly after this story, Jesus begins his ministry (4:12-17), and he calls his first disciples (4:18-22). He teaches and heals many people, like Matthew says, from every illness and disease (4:23-25). The whole beginning of his ministry, therefore depends on what happens in the desert. What happens here will ultimately determine what later can happen.

Jesus accepted the challenge without hesitation

This time of temptation in the wilderness that Jesus was subjected to is therefore not bad news for us. This is good news for us, it is the gospel. Why? Because Jesus accepted the challenge without hesitation, without recoil.

This has already been the first victory; not to give in to the need to have things easier in life. He passes the test with flying colours as an everlasting testimony that in Him we have our victory over the devil, the tempter and accuser. He persisted throughout this. This is the powerful evidence that He can encourage us with.

What we need to see, is that the temptation wasn’t just a tough part of Jesus’ way, something that he had to go through and so had to get behind as quickly as possible. No, it was a key aspect of his ministry, his preparation for what he had to do eventually.

This is the idea that you should brace yourself with for the way you should go. Temptations aren’t all bad. It is not only meant to hurt you. It is intended to give you the courage to walk the way of the Lord. It is intended to give marrow in your pipes, to make you strong for life with God.
It is also the goal of temptation in your life

It is also the goal of temptation in your life. You might think God relentlessly wants to expose you to temptation, whatever it may be for you. But, even if it is bad and heavy, the aim is to make you strong from within, so that you do not waver in your faith and do not falter in obedience.

James, brother of Jesus, said much later about temptation: "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him." (James. 1:12).

There is an incredible blessing locked up in steadfastness in temptation. If you pass the test, you will get the victory prize, life will flow out of your belly and spring up to eternal life.

So. Temptations always have a goal. It is meant to make you strong in faith. It is the intention to help you persevere in your obedience. It is not intended to make you stumble. It is not intended to make life difficult for you. It is meant to give you victory, so life can be strong and can give life to others.

The temptation of power

And one can hardly think about three temptations that could fit better into God's purpose in this wilderness period in the life of Jesus.

The temptation of the devil in the first place is that Jesus will do something spectacular – that he would make bread of stones to still his hunger. The aim of the devil is that Jesus will fall for the temptation to use his power for the sake of himself. The purpose of the Spirit are opposed to this and wants Jesus to say no to this temptation so that he might do wonders later in His ministry without thereby focusing the attention on himself.

Jesus meets the devil with the word of Deuteronomy 8:3 that focuses on God's words that are more important than focusing on wonder bread: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

By this He gained the confidence to later ask God for miracles, where it fits into God's intentions and is not about himself. And later in the gospel He increased bread on two occasions (chapters. 14 and 15) in addition to doing a lot of other wonders.

Some of our power lies in our knowledge. Other's strength lies in their emotional intelligence. Other's strength lies in their possessions. The temptation to which we must learn to say no, is to use our knowledge to find our way in life. Or our emotional intelligence. Or possessions.

Jesus shows us how to use everything we have to let God's will happen, as He actually would do later by giving bread to the hungry, and healing for people who were sick. What you have, is only borrowed anyway. What you are, is just grace. And God will bring his kingdom into this world. But you will not be a co-worker if you do not say no to the temptation to use your abilities just for yourself and the small circle around you.
The secret of Jesus’ resistance in temptation lies in the initial response to the devil: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." He trumped every temptation with the word of God. This is where your strength to persevere also lies in the grip on the words of God that not only call you, but allow you to persist.

The temptation of promises

The temptation of the devil in the second place is that Jesus will use God's promises of protection in Scripture – Psalm. 91 – to make a name for himself by jumping from the highest point of the temple. The aim of the devil is to let Him abuse God's promises for His own sake, the very words that God gave on which He could rely, for the sake of others. The purpose of the Spirit are for Jesus to say no to this temptation so that He can fully rely on God's promises for the sake of others, but not for Himself.

Jesus meets the devil with the word of Deuteronomy 6:16 that He would uphold God's name, by not provoking or testing Him. With that he acquired the liberty to claim God's promises in many situations in his ministry, including the many times he assured believers of God's willingness to hear prayers.

Here we have nothing to do with what we have, but what God has. And to apply those promises in a selfish way to ourselves and just to demand it for ourselves. Lord bless me. Lord let this project of mine succeed. Lord help me to get the contract rather than someone else. Instead of trusting God that He knows best and will do the best.

Again James respond to this, as he often did with Jesus’ words (James 4). He warns us that we must become more aware of the desires that constantly rage within us. We many times want things from God, but become upset if we do not get it, but others do. This leads to jealousy, quarrels and fights.

Of course, we may disclose our needs to God. In fact, we often do not receive, simply because we do not pray, James says. But we easily do the praying in the wrong way, because we just want to satisfy our selfish desires. Then we really become friends with the world that want to see our needs met at all costs, no matter what God has to say about it. And this is enmity with God.

God wants us completely to himself. He seeks no competition. He does not want to be provoked by our prayers when we address Him because He did not give us the things we asked Him. If we really are willing to trust him with our lives, we can draw near to God in confidence, and experience it that he will draw near to us.

But we must cleanse our hearts of our selfish needs so that God can use us to pray in line with His promises for the needs of the kingdom and to act with Him for this world.

The temptation of the easy way out

The temptation of the devil is in the third place that Jesus would establish His kingdom on earth, by kneeling down before the devil and worshiping him. The devil’s aim is to persuade Jesus to take the easy route, the path of least resistance, the shortcut to fame and glory. The purpose of
the Spirit against that, is that Jesus will say NO to those temptations, that he will follow the very difficult path of suffering and the cross from the beginning, so that he thereby may obtain salvation for everyone who believes in him.

Jesus therefore opposes the devil with the word of Deuteronomy 6:13 that one can only worship and serve God. By this He associated Himself completely with God's side and declared he himself prepared to walk God's way, whatever it may cost.

What is of course at stake here is Jesus' Sonship and whether he will serve God or Himself. The devil wants to raise doubt in Jesus and let him live independent of God. Jesus is indeed God! The Spirit however wants to teach Jesus to embrace the path of suffering, without denying his Sonship, but to not abuse His status for himself, but to live for the sake of God's purposes that eventually would ask of Him to die.

This is the challenge for us. Are we willing to follow the path that God shows, even if it costs us suffering and sacrifices, when it asks of you to go solo where not only there isn't people with you, but even people that actively oppose you?

Lynette and I yesterday watched the movie Hacksaw Ridge which tells the story of Desmond Doss who wanted to serve in World War II as a medic, but did not want to handle a gun. His challenge was simply amazing. Not only did his own company mates initially reviled him and his commanders made it virtually impossible for him to master the training and complete his course.

No, he is ultimately slapped with a lawsuit against him to dismiss him dishonourably from the army, in which even the one closest to him wanted to give him an easy way out – give them what they want so that you can get to the battlefield and do what you consider to be your calling.

The anguish of the easier way out. He chose to remain faithful to his belief and follow the difficult way. And I do not want to spoil the movie for those who still want to see it, but God honoured his loyalty to his beliefs and brought him to Hacksaw Ridge to serve in the war.

When he emerged the hero of Okinawa by saving 75 of his fellow soldiers from certain death – without a gun! – whilst exhausted and in deathly danger, he still escorted soldier after soldier to safety: "Just one more, Lord, just one more" – his testimony left an impression not only on his own soldiers and mates, and his officers, but on the whole of America. Desmond was therefore awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, the only conscientious objector ever to receive this award.

That Desmond’s life was eventually saved, he lived until 2006, was a fitting reward for his fearless loyalty to that in which he believed.

We see something of this in the last sentence of our text, about Jesus who was rewarded by the angels who came to care for him after the devil left him alone. God thus fulfilled his promise in Ps. 91. without Jesus having to ask first!
All this was of course only the calm before the next storm that Jesus in his life had to endure and finally the death on the cross. He died to save not only 75 people from death, but a whole kingdom of people.

May this example of Jesus inspire you to be faithful unto death.

Prayer

GOD SENDS US TO LIVE

Final Song

Song 400 - Chorus and v3, 4 and 5 all choir v1 and 2 Praise, praise him, our Saviour on the cross, that every tongue and language could honour him – stand

Benediction

Response

Song 400 a refrain: Praise, praise him, our Saviour on the cross, that every tongue and language could honour him – stand