

Rappahannock Christian Church – 3/13/11
Dr. Kenneth Wilbur

Communion Meditation

There is a song that we sometimes sing when we come to this Table called “Lead Me To Calvary.” Today is the first Sunday of Lent, and really, this is what Lent is doing; it is leading to Calvary and beyond -- to the miracle of the empty tomb. This is the whole story of Jesus’ life. From beginning to end, His whole life leads inexorably to the reason He came; to His crucifixion. The Bread and Cup remind us of the purpose and journey of His life, and what He has won for us. Let me read you the story from the gospel of Matthew.

Matthew 26:26-29 – As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “Take this and eat it, for this is my body.”

And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, “Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many. Mark my words—I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new with you in my Father’s Kingdom.”

“Lead Us Not Into...”

In our Scripture today we’re going to read the account of Jesus’ temptation, which is found in the first 11 verses of Matthew chapter 4. This event follows immediately upon Jesus’ baptism.

Matthew 4:1-11 - Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry. During that time the devil came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.”

But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say,

‘People do not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say,

‘He will order his angels to protect you.
And they will hold you up with their hands
so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone.’”

Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘You must not test the LORD your God.’”

Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. “I will give it all to you,” he said, “if you will kneel down and worship me.”

“Get out of here, Satan,” Jesus told him. “For the Scriptures say,

‘You must worship the LORD your God
and serve only him.’”

Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

I know I’ve told you the story of the little boy whose mom came into the kitchen and found him with his hand in the cookie jar. When she asked just what he was doing, he replied, “I’m resisting temptation, Mom.” Well, that is not a good place to resist temptation! In our Scripture today we have the story of Jesus being tempted. But in this case the word “tempted” may be misleading. Jesus’ temptation is more of a “testing.” Jesus is tested here with respect to His resolve; His

determination; His commitment to the mission that God has sent Him to do -- that is, to accept His role as God's Suffering Servant.

I also do not think, as some may, that this testing of Jesus is a charade. I believe that He is truly being tested. This is especially clear when you see that the temptation immediately follows His baptism. The baptism of Jesus was not a charade, either. It was a significant event in the life of Jesus. It was a trigger. It launched him into his public ministry. Remember that, at the baptism Jesus came up out of the water and the voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased." The temptation then begins with Satan saying, "IF you ARE the Son of God..." So here we have a test of Jesus' commitment to His mission. As the Suffering Servant, Jesus' life will be one of humility, privation and loneliness, even persecution at the hands of some of the most powerful people in Israel. He will be scorned, misunderstood, and wrongly accused.

With all of this in mind, let's take a look at the temptations themselves:

"Turn these stones into bread!" Jesus is hungry, and (unlike you!) He really *can* satisfy himself by making the stones into bread. The question is, *will* Jesus use the powers that God has given Him to *get*, to *acquire*, to *satisfy the desires of his humanity and of His flesh*? The answer is no! "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Yes, he does have to eat and sleep, but satisfying the desires of the body is not the fundamental reason for His being. It is not His primary purpose or the reason He was sent. Instead, God wants Him to use His powers to benefit others -- exorcising demons, healing the lame, the blind, the sick and dying for sins.

Next Satan takes Him to the top of the Temple and says, "Cast yourself down, and God will surely save you." Jesus' response tells us that the point of this temptation is to test and to verify God's truthfulness and faithfulness. Yes, God has promised to watch over me. Nothing will happen that God has not ordained. But let's test this out! Let's question God; let's make sure! So I'll throw myself off the Temple, and see if God sends an angel to catch me just before I hit the ground? No! Jesus' mission is surely not to question, test or make demands of God. Actually, His purpose is just the opposite. It involves humble obedience and acceptance of God's will; a willingness to walk down the road that God has laid out for His life -- a road that will be fraught with pain, rejection and cruel death.

Finally Satan takes Him up onto the high mountain and shows Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "I will give you all this if you will bow down and worship me." This test is pretty obvious. What will hold Jesus' focus? To what ends will Jesus be committed? What will demand the concentration of His time, His energy, His intellect, His heart? Is He committed to the way of the world or to the way of God? The choice for Jesus is stark and clear. To worship and obey God will mean, for Jesus, a complete and utter rejection of all else, of everything that the world has to offer.

Do you see that this is way more than just the story of a kid with his hand in the cookie jar? This is a real testing. The devil is offering Jesus a real opportunity to consider what is being asked of Him. This is His chance to back out by giving in to the temptations. Jesus could have said, "*No! This is unfair! Why should I, an innocent person, have to sacrifice anything -- even a single hair of my head -- for the sinners of this world? I won't do it!*" Instead Jesus, by His obedience, saved us all.

Benediction

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. –
Philippians 4:7