

# “Living by Bread Alone”

Luke 4:1-13

February 21, 2010

So we enter into the season of Lent with the Gospel text that speaks of the temptation of Jesus. It was preceded, of course, with that Old Testament text that told the story of the Old Testament people of God celebrating the harvest festival .... Bringing their offerings to the temple - their gifts to be given to God because they remember all that God had done for them by bringing them out of slavery in Egypt. That text forms the basis for the way they thought and the way that we are invited to think. God has been with us throughout our life's journey - God has blessed us and rescued us. We live our lives in response to that gracious God. We give of ourselves and of our possessions because God has blessed us. But, in this world there will be temptations that will seek to lead us away from God. How then will we respond to those temptations that come.

Temptations are sure to come. They came to Jesus. They will come to us no matter how clearly we recognize that God has blessed us.

It is always helpful for me to think about the temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness. On the surface they really seem pretty weird and disconnected from what we experience in our lives. We don't have to worry about turning stones into bread - we just can not do it. Very few of us would think of standing on the pinnacle of the temple or ever imagine having authority over all of the kingdoms of the world. But beyond those obvious observations and literal reading of the text, these are the very real kinds of temptations that we face every day.

I would like to ponder just one of these temptations with you this morning. Let's think about the bread for a moment. Specifically - think for a moment about the comment of Jesus that ends that first temptation ... “One can not live by bread alone ....” What a fascinating line from one who will later make the statement, “I am the bread of life ....” Of course, the intent is to suggest to the tempter that there are more important things than eating. Still, we know that we need our daily bread - we pray that God will supply us with such basic necessities. Of course we need daily bread .... And perhaps a little more.

I was fascinated to read a letter I received this week from the monks at Assumption Abby in Richardton, ND. It was an article that spoke of the importance of solitude. The article began by relating an event that was described in a book by Carrie Young entitled “Nothing To Do But Stay”. The article began like this: “In 1904, at the age of 25, Carrine Gafkjen, an immigrant from Norway, staked out a 160 acre homestead 30 miles north of Williston, ND. For a home, she moved into a one room tarpaper shack. And for the required 6 months of the claim she lived there alone without electricity, running water, newspaper or visitors. Once a week, she walked 5 miles to Little Muddy Creek in order to do her wash and haul home enough water to boil for drinking. Potatoes and salt were her only food. She spoke to no one except the man she hired to break the land with his plow and four oxen.” Can you even imagine what it must have been like - nothing to eat but potatoes and salt - nothing to drink but water hauled 5 miles from the Little

Muddy creek. One can not live by potatoes alone .... Not even if they have been made into lefsa.

How do we hear this temptation in our time? Jesus refuses to give into His hunger and puts His trust in God. It is not that bread is bad - we need bread to eat - but we also need God.

So we echo the words of Jesus - "One can not live by bread alone!" It plays over and over in our head. And we go on to conclude that what Jesus intends to suggest is that we need a little something to go with the bread. A little butter and a piece of meat perhaps. That's better! And if you are going to have a sandwich, there needs to be some bars .... And coffee [always coffee]. And maybe some chips and pickles. And really that isn't very much for a growing boy or girl so maybe we should scratch that and go for some mashed potatoes, turkey, dressing, a few salads, apple and pecan pies .... With a little ice cream [and coffee]. And then we should have some candles on the table and some better China - a little red wine - and if we are going to have a real meal maybe I need a new suit / a new dress ... And these shoes don't match. And now that I am sitting at the table it is clear that the dining room needs to be remodeled and if we are going to do that maybe we need to tear it all down and start from scratch .... And of course that old car just doesn't look right next to the new house. No !!! Bread alone will not do it! We could not make it on bread alone and we could never endure the wilderness or even the relatively quiet life. We imagine that the world is coming to an end if the cell phone doesn't work or the electricity goes out or the car is out of gas. No! Bread alone will not do it but when we go a third time through the buffet line and still feel empty, there is something wrong.

I read an article which talked about a press conference that Bill Clinton had with MTV when he was President. President Clinton was amused to answer questions about his underwear and his favorite rock song. But the atmosphere turned serious when 17-year-old girl named Dahlia Schweitzer asked a penetrating question. "Mr. President," Dahlia said, "it seems to me that [singer] Kurt Cobain's recent suicide exemplified the emptiness that many in our generation feel. How do you propose to teach our youth how important life is?" The article went on to suggest that the singer had everything that money could buy, millions of fans, and used drugs to feel better but still he felt so empty that he resorted to suicide.

A person can not live by bread alone ..... so we give in to the temptation to add all of the trimmings thinking that will fill us. And yet we seldom think to turn instead to the bread of Life. In Matthews account of the temptation Jesus includes a second part to this great line. "One can not live by bread alone" .... and then adds, "but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Today we come to the first Sunday of Lent. Lent is intended to be a time of reflection that leads us back to or closer to God. As I ponder this great temptation that Jesus faced in the wilderness I find myself also reflecting on a line that I ran across in another article I read. In it the author said; "The path to the buffet table and the path to sanctification lie in opposite directions." I am not exactly sure what that means but I wonder if our insatiable appetite for all of the trimmings of life does not lead us away from God.

The ancient Hebrew people did not have much. Largely, they had little but they recognized that all they had, came from God - they would not have life itself apart from God. And so they came with thanksgiving - freely bringing to God the first tenth of the harvest. And as they presented their tithes and offerings, they recited their story ..... a story of life blessed by God.

Is that your story? As you journey through this lenten season can you see the blessings of God? Will you tell that story to one another ..... or will we need to rush to the mall instead and feel empty because we do not have the latest gadget?

God continues to bless - God continues to provide our daily bread. Will we be content and

bless the Lord?

AMEN