

40 Days
2-17-2013

Luke 4:1-13

1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.' " 5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. 7 So if you worship me, it will all be yours." 8 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.' " 9 The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. 10 For it is written: " 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; 11 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' " 12 Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' " 13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Romans 10:8-13

8 But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming; 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. 11 As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Did y'all know that today was an anniversary of sorts for us at Hooker Memorial? On February 18, 2012, actually the third Sunday in February, just as today is the third Sunday, I preached my first sermon as your Interim pastor. So today is actually our first anniversary. Happy anniversary Hooker Memorial. It's not very often I use two scripture lessons for one sermon, yet, today I felt it necessary. You will see why shortly.

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. I decided to look for a good definition of Lent so that we would know what I was talking about. I searched for a while and found one: "The purpose of Lent is to be a season of fasting, self-denial, spiritual growth, conversion, and simplicity. Lent, which comes from the Teutonic (Germanic) word for springtime, can be viewed as a spiritual spring cleaning: a time for taking spiritual inventory and then cleaning out those things which hinder our corporate and personal relationships with Jesus Christ and our service to him." I felt this was an excellent definition. When I went back and looked at that first Lenten sermon I did last year, I found that I had used that same definition. The part I like the most was the statement that said "a time for taking spiritual inventory and then cleaning out those things which hinder our personal relationships with Jesus Christ and our service to him." That is what Satan was trying to do when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Satan was trying to hinder Jesus' personal relationship with God.

When Lee lit the first candle during our Lenten liturgy this morning, I hope you picked up on our Lenten theme for today: resistance to temptation. The first scripture lesson we heard this morning dealt with the temptations of Jesus Christ in the wilderness. Jesus came to earth in human form. Because He was human, He knows exactly what our temptations feel like. Satan went to the wilderness, found Jesus, and tempted Him. Jesus was able to answer each of these temptations with the word NO. He didn't use the actual word no, Christ told Satan no by quoting scripture to him. Jesus has been fasting in the wilderness for 40 days and was bound to be extremely hungry. In verse three, Satan says, **tell this stone to become bread.**" Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8: 3, **"It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'**" The first temptation failed. So Satan shows Jesus all the wonders of the world. Then in verse seven Satan says, **If you worship me, it will all be yours.**" And again,

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy using chapter 6:13: **“It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’** No to the second temptation. Satan thought he would get wise and quotes scripture to Christ for the third temptation and says **“If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. ¹⁰ For it is written: “‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’** Yet, once again Christ was able to resist temptation and turn the scriptures against Satan by quoting Deuteronomy this time using 6:16, **“Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”** Three temptations, three resounding NO’s. Satan tempted Jesus and Satan tempts us in the same ways. The three temptations of Jesus are excellent metaphors for all the things that tempt us today. In our candle lighting liturgy this morning, Lee talked about the temptations of ignoring problems such as hunger, poverty, war and disease. He spoke of the temptations caused by wealth and consumerism and of us straying from the path of our faith. Then, he lit a candle as a symbol of our faith in Jesus Christ. As he lit the candle he spoke of us using our faith to help keep us free, to use our faith to help us resist temptation.

In our scripture lesson from Romans this morning, we heard how our faith saves us. Listen to verse eight: **it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:** God made salvation quite simple for us. All we have to do is this: **That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.** That is the first half of the equation. The other half is the hard part: **and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified,** It is with your heart that you believe. Anyone can stand up in public and claim to believe. But God knows what is in your heart. That’s where we tend to get in trouble. We tend to forget that God listens to our hearts more than He listens to our mouths. God knows what is really in each of our hearts.

This particular section of scripture from Romans is what I call the salvation equation: **mouth + heart = salvation.** Let’s talk about the first portion of what I’m calling the salvation equation, the mouth. Any one of us can stand up and say almost anything, but that doesn’t make it true. What if I stood up here this morning and tried to convince you that I was a flower. What if I was able to describe to you how each part of my body was just like a part of a flower. What if I could make valid comparisons between leaves and stems and blossoms and then compare them to my arms, my legs, and my head. Would that make me a flower; obviously not. Probably the closest comparison you could make would be to call me a “blooming idiot”. You see, no matter how I try to spin it, I’m not a flower. Listen again to verse nine: **That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.** The first part of the equation is that you have to confess, Jesus is Lord. You can’t just say it, you must confess it. You can’t be ashamed to confess it. It’s easy to say it here on Sunday morning. Theoretically, we’re all here for the same reason: to worship the Lord. We’re all like minded and say we believe in Jesus Christ. So this is an easy place to say I believe in Jesus Christ, I believe Jesus is Lord. Now... how many of you stand up at work, or at bridge club, or at bunko, or on the golf course, or in the mall, or in a restaurant, you know, wherever you may be whether you’re with friends or with strangers and confess to believe in Jesus Christ? Regardless of where you are, how many of you are willing to stand up and confess Jesus is Lord? See, there is a difference in saying something and confessing something. I have a good friend who has told me on several occasions that I am one of the few people he knows that he feels like he can have an open discussion about how he feels about Jesus Christ. But then again, this person knows I believe Jesus is Lord. He’s afraid of what others may think of him, so he is not really ready to confess publicly, Jesus is Lord. Question for you; are you like my friend? Are you afraid of what others will think so you won’t confess your belief in Jesus while you’re out in public. The Apostle Paul tells us here in Romans 10, we must confess Jesus is Lord. To me, there is a major difference in saying something, and confessing something. As I said a minute ago, you can say anything. I am a flower. When you just “say” things, you are using your mind and your mouth. Growing up, Momma used to tell me on a regular basis, boy, you are putting your mouth in motion, before you put our mind in gear. All too often, I was saying things without thinking them through, first. Just saying something is one thing. Confessing something, in my humble opinion, is a totally different matter. When you confess, you are speaking from the heart. And that brings us to the second half of the equation; the heart.

Let's discuss this for just a moment. Listen again to the last half of verse nine and the first half of verse ten: **and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified.** Heart; I'm not talking about that fist sized muscle that's located in the upper left quadrant of your torso; that muscle that pumps the blood through your veins. I'm talking about that spiritual part that controls you; that part that controls your very being, the part that makes you who you are. That is what Paul is talking about here in Romans. Believe in your heart; believe with that part of your being that controls you, that controls who you are. Believe with that part of your being that controls what you do, who you see, where you go, what you say; believe with that part of you that controls every aspect of your life. Believe with your heart and you are justified. When you believe with your heart, you are a changed person. When you believe with your heart, you want to emulate our Lord Jesus Christ. You want to be His hands and His feet. You want to reach out to those who do not know Him. You want to touch lives and make them better in the name of Jesus Christ. Richard is about to leave on his mission trip. I doubt that Richard will convert the multitudes to Christianity while he is in Nicaragua. But that isn't his purpose. That's not why he's going. He is going there to be the hands and feet of Jesus. He is going there to help make the lives of those people better, and he is doing so in the name of Jesus Christ. I applaud Richard for going on this trip, and I'm not trying to play down what he is doing. But you don't have to go to Nicaragua to be the hands and feet of Jesus. You can do that right here in our community; you can do that in your day-to-day lives. All you have to do is work the salvation equation: confess with your mouth plus believe with your heart. That will equal salvation, not only for you, but for the people you reach as well.

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. The next forty days is our Lenten season. It's time for each one of us to recognize that we are in the wilderness being tempted by Satan. It is no coincidence that the season of Lent is the forty days before Easter. Easter is the most exciting and important thing we celebrate as Christians. It is at Easter that we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. It is at Easter we celebrate that Jesus conquered death and sin. But the forty days before Easter have been remembered by the church as a time to discipline ourselves and focus on our need for what Christ has done for us. Lent can be an opportunity for us to spend time in the wilderness as Jesus did. It can be a time where we get our priorities straight. It can be a time where we learn to rely on God and not ourselves, a time where we turn over our sins, our pride, and our selfishness to God and allow Him to work a special way in our lives. Lent is not something to be dreaded, something to be mocked. It is not at all about being depressed or overly hard on ourselves. It is something that we can celebrate. We can celebrate turning our lives over to God. This year, may you truly celebrate the season of Lent.