

The Garden of Temptation

Luke 4:1-13

Introduction

Welcome to the first Sunday in Lent. Over these next six weeks leading up to Easter Sunday, we are going on a journey from one garden to another – From Garden to Garden. That is our theme for this season.

I introduced it to you on Ash Wednesday by starting in the Garden of Eden, a place where God and His creation enjoyed a beautiful, life-giving relationship. But also a place where that relationship was destroyed by the introduction of sin into the created order.

That sin meant we needed a new garden, and in His great love for us God provided the Garden of the Empty Tomb – site of the resurrection of Jesus. The story of redemption is the story of these two gardens – from Garden to Garden.

That story is communicated through the stories of two men: Adam and Jesus. So for our memory verse for this season, I would like to challenge you to memorize these words:

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (I Corinthians 15:21-22)

Our journey takes us to a different kind of garden ... a Garden of Temptation. Actually, it is a wilderness, and it is described in Luke 4. To set the stage though I want you to hear the story of another garden, one located in Bellevue TN, just outside of Nashville.

This garden, known as the Bell Garden, reopened to business just four weeks ago. They had been closed since early December after vandals did several thousand dollars' worth of damage to this community garden and food ministry.

- The garden is a joint project with Bellevue Middle School and together they are committed to providing garden-based services, including education and food distribution to the members of its community.
- It has fruit trees, blackberry bushes and a year-round farm stand where it sells canned goods, fresh produce, dried herbs and more.

On that day in early December vandals drove their cars through the property and broke into their portable classroom and office, destroying the place, both inside and out.

The leaders of the garden who were interviewed by the local news stations asked the questions you would expect, like:

Why would anyone do something like this?

There may have been a specific reason. The culprits have not been caught, so we may never know. But ultimately the reason for every bit of evil in the world is well known. The

Apostle Peter knew that very well, so when he wrote his first epistle he warned his readers:

Be alert ... Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

That theme is carried throughout the Scripture. Whenever God is at work, the devil is looking for a way to devour it.

- We saw it in the Garden of Eden, didn't we?
- And we know it from our own personal experience.

Did you know that Jesus is not exempt from the devil's efforts!

- Our Gospel text today takes place immediately following the baptism of Jesus.
- That was a wonderful God-filled event!
- The Holy Spirit descends, God's voice booms from the heavens – awesome in every way.

So if God does something good, Satan needs to counter that with something bad.

- Our text describes how Satan came to Jesus and “tempted Him.”

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. (Luke 4:1-2)

On our journey from Garden to Garden – from the Garden of Eden to the garden of the empty tomb we will experience many realities that will cause us to long for the victory of Jesus on Easter day.

- One of those realities is that we must face the temptations Satan brings our way.

Let's look at how the devil tempted Jesus – and how he continues to tempt us.

#1: THE TEMPTATION TO QUESTION IT

Look at verse 3:

The devil said to him, “**If** you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” (Luke 4:3)

“If you are the Son of God ...” The temptation challenges what God Himself had said when Jesus was baptized by John in the River Jordan just 40 days beforehand.

And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:22)

The Word of God was clear, but now Satan invites Jesus to question that truth.

- Son of God? Are you really?
- Maybe that's not what God meant. Perhaps He was caught up in the moment.
- Maybe God meant for that to be interpreted figuratively. After all, aren't we all children of God?

It is the same strategy Satan employed back in the Garden of Eden.

Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden?" (Genesis 3:1)

That apple looks mighty tasty. Why would a God who claims to love you prohibit something as inviting as that?

Then and now, Satan continues to challenge those who seek to follow Jesus in this same way. He invites us to question everything God has told us.

- Do you really believe God hears you when you pray?
- Do you really believe God is with you right now?
- Do you honestly think He sees you in this world of 8.2 billion people?
- Do you really believe God will forgive THAT sin?

And on it goes. This first temptation didn't work with Jesus, so Satan moved on to another tried and true method:

#2: THE TEMPTATION TO CIRCUMVENT IT

Look at verses 6-7. Showing Jesus all the cities of world – the cities Jesus came to die for, Satan says:

I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours. (Luke 4:6-7)

This second temptation is an invitation to take the easier way. "Jesus, you don't have to suffer and die on a cross. You don't have to experience all that pain. You don't have to be away from your home in heaven for the next three years. You don't have to endure the rejection of your disciples. You can accomplish the same result without all the hard work. All you have to do is bow down and worship me. And all of this will be yours!"

We humans are always looking for the easier way to do the really hard thing. Geico Insurance used to have a wonderful commercial showing a man doing aerobic exercise from the comfort of his La-Z-Boy recliner. That resonates with us.

- State lotteries are growing in popularity because there has to be an easier way to get rich.
- My dad refused to make popcorn in the microwave, preferring to put a little oil in the saucepan and shake it on the stove top. I don't do that. It's too much work. I just pop a bag into the microwave.

It is very tempting to approach our faith that way too. But Jesus calls us to the difficult task of discipleship:

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. (Luke 9:23)

Carry a cross? That sounds like hard work! Wouldn't it be easier, we say, to simply:

- Throw an extra dollar in the offering plate

- Volunteer with Fred Stegner at the Springfield Soup Kitchen once or twice a year
- Wear a pretty cross around our necks.

Being a follower of Jesus shouldn't be hard, we think. And Satan cheers us if we choose think that way! Just do it my way, he says! It's easier. Microwave your faith!

This strategy didn't work with Jesus either, so Satan moved on to yet one more another tried and true method:

#3: THE TEMPTATION TO PROVE IT

Look at verses 10-11:

If you are the Son of God," (Satan) said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully ...'" (Luke 4:10-11)

If you are God's Son, prove it. Make God clear up any questions before you start, Satan says, because a mission of this magnitude should only be undertaken if you are 100% certain in every way. Make God prove it first!

It's a fascinating argument. Why should Jesus take all the risk? Why should Jesus go through all of what is to come if there is even the slightest chance that God won't live up to His part of the bargain.

And frankly, that is what faith is all about. Faith does not require all the answers. Faith says, "I don't have all the proof. I don't even understand it all. But I trust God. And I believe He will be faithful. That much I do know."

Satan can paralyze a Christian – even an entire church or denomination – if he can convince them that they should do nothing until they have all the answers.

Strike three. Jesus did not yield to the temptation. And we read:

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:13)

APPLICATION

Satan was not afraid of Jesus, and he is certainly not afraid of you. So temptation will come. The Garden of Temptation will indeed be a part of your journey.

But because we live on this side of Easter Sunday, we know that Jesus has already won the victory over Satan. We know there is another garden ahead. Take heart! You are on the winning side.

And Jesus came through those temptations because of His relationship with the Father. He did the hard work of faith, spending time alone with God and knowing what was written in Scripture. That's the secret of success. Build on it.

Here's another Scripture for you to memorize:

The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Amen.