

*Lent 1A – Matt 4:1-11 –
“Don’t lick the knife”*

The Inuit people of North America have a legend. This legend describes how they killed the wolves that threatened their communities and their property. In rather graphic terms, they describe how they are able to bring down a wolf simply by coating several layers of frozen blood on a sharp knife sticking out of the frozen arctic plain (between the ice cap and the tree line.)

It’s believed that the wolf picks up the scent and, after circling the knife warily, begins licking the frozen blood. And as the wolf continues to lick faster and faster, the desire for blood literally drives the wolf wild.

The craving for more and more becomes so great that the wolf never notices the sting of the sharp blade on his tongue as the blood he’s consuming gradually becomes his own.

Morning finds the wolf lying dead in the snow.

It’s a graphic image of what happens when temptation leads to giving in and sin claims a victim. When I found this story initially I balked at even telling it. But we need to hear it!

It’s a gruesome reminder about the power of temptation, and how temptation lures each one of us just as the bloody knife attracts the unsuspecting wolf.

We may respond warily at first, but we soon become consumed by ***the desire of the moment***, never noticing the deadly sting of the sharp blade of ‘giving in’ as the blood consumed eventually becomes our own.

Temptation is dangerous and deadly – let’s be clear about that.

But temptation isn’t sin.

Temptation gives birth to sin when we succumb to its allure and give in – putting its false promises into action in our lives.

We play down temptation as much as we can so we don’t feel bad about the things we get caught up in – but temptation is dangerous and deadly.

There isn’t one adult or child here today, or anyone who will ever read this message or hear it through our Cairns website, who hasn’t been or won’t be impacted by the destructive power of temptation.

The cost of giving in to temptation is devastating.

- People go about their lives carrying heavy burdens and a bad conscience that keeps on accusing them and pulling them down.
- Trust is compromised,
- Jobs are jeopardized,
- People become withdrawn and isolated [especially from the church] because of guilt and shame,
- Marriages are lost or struggle to move on,
- Relationships are ravaged,
- Lives are ruined.

How have you been impacted by temptation? When have you found yourself circling the knife before giving in to its allure?

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Temptation is a force more deceptively powerful than we give it credit for, and that’s part of the reason why it’s such a big issue for us - and every culture. At the same time we need to remember something today as we meditate on these biblical texts. We don’t live in a world where two equal but opposite forces are in a cosmic battle against each other. Satan is not equal to God – he stands under the authority of God and His judgment.

There is a spiritual battle going on – but the outcome was decided when Jesus died on the cross and was raised in glory. Yes there is evil present – we know that simply from our daily experience of life – and the biblical witness.

But our God reigns victorious.

The battle has been won meaning that the temptations, testing and trials you face this side of heaven are temporary.

Our God is bigger than the sum of the temptations we face.

And he hasn’t left us on our own.

So what happened between Jesus and the slanderer this morning and what’s our defense?

Immediately after Jesus’ baptism He faced the devil.

Jesus had come into the world to overcome Satan for us, and this stand off happens right at the beginning of His ministry. And what we witness here in Matt 4 is both temptation and testing.

The devil *was* trying to tempt Jesus; trying to lead him into sin and divert him from His saving work on the cross. But at the same time Jesus was led ‘by the Spirit’ to be *tested*. Tested in the sense of ‘proving’ him to be the Son of God. So Satan attacks first what he perceives to be Jesus’ point of weakness. Jesus had been fasting for 40 days and 40 nights.

The temptation? To turn stones into bread.

It’s an obvious tactic isn’t it – to hit the weak spots first? When we’re hungry we’re most easily depressed and discouraged...and most easily tempted.

If you’ve ever watched the Biggest Loser you’ll notice that the producers go about things the same way.

These people trying to lose weight obviously struggle with food – so while the contestants are hungry and craving the food they no longer eat, a plate full of junk food is placed before them and they are tempted to eat it.

The promise is immunity. ***“If you just eat this (you know you want to) you might just secure immunity from being kicked off the show at the next weigh in.”***

Jesus responded to Satan saying, ***“It’s in writing, a human being will not live by bread alone [not that we don’t need bread at all – but that we don’t live on***

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bread only], but by every word that comes pouring out of God’s mouth.”

Jesus takes up the Sword of the Spirit instead of licking the bloodied knife in the snow.

The second temptation is filled with Holy things.

The first smelled like a bakery, but this one is filled with the Holy city Jerusalem, the Holy Temple and the Holy Scriptures.

Instead of attacking Jesus by aiming at a perceived weakness – he goes for the strength, Jesus belief in the word of God that he had just used to ward off the first temptation.

Satan is saying, ***“Put your money where your mouth is – you believe in the Word don’t you? Take a risk of faith and step off the high ledge – you won’t plummet down and die.”***

It’s about manipulation and trying to force the hand of God.

Satan twisted and manipulated scripture (Psalm 91). But testing God is not the same trusting Him is it? Satan uses our stomachs and appetites and even our faith in the Word to divert us off the path of eternal life.

He wants to cast doubt over the power of your baptism and especially the promises of God’s word in your life.

Jesus responded, with the pure word of God saying, ***“It’s in writing in another part of scripture: don’t you test out or manipulate the Lord your God.”***

And Jesus again walked past the bloodied knife in the snow.

After Jesus proved true in his physical needs and then in the Word of God, Satan goes for Jesus’ love for the world – ***including all of us who live in it.***

He offers Jesus what’s not his to offer!

All the kingdoms of the world and their glory if Jesus will just show Satan some worship. What a bargain – one momentary bow before the devil and the promise? The whole world thrown in for free: ***It was a big juicy, bloodied knife:***

Only God’s love for you is greater than any false promise of the devil, and so Jesus says, ***“Get out of here Satan: it’s in writing, you shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.”***

Jesus is tempted and tested as true. True Son of God. That means that the devil we face is a ***defeated devil*** because we live and are joined to the ***conquering Christ.***

Jesus Christ was tempted in every way as we are – but didn’t sin.

- Jesus who sees the blood coated knife in the arctic plain...and walks straight past it.

The book of Hebrews says, ***“¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach the***

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throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Remember that next time you find yourself in a jam or feeling bogged down and sluggish under the accusations of Satan.

Your life is hidden in Christ. You’ve been joined to him in the cleansing waters of baptism. Where we fail, Jesus was victorious. He has carried the burden and punishment for our failures and he has served us well.

In fact Jesus did it perfectly.

Often in the throes of temptation we feel guilt and shame in our weakness.

The problem is that Satan then uses that to isolate people.

To pull you away from the family of believers which is the church and those people who support and encourage us.

His lies start to convince us that we are not worthy to approach the throne of grace; that we are unworthy of God’s mercy, his healing and forgiveness. ***That God wants to punish us, not help us!***

That’s not what God’s Word declares to us though.

But the only way we know that is by immersing ourselves and saturating ourselves in the Scriptures of life and light.

If we aren’t people who are living in the Word – then how will you know the truth amidst the onslaught of lies?

Where will you draw strength from when confronted with the knife of temptation? Will you point and orient yourself to Jesus when that time comes? – and it will...

It’s why people come together to pray and support one another. It’s why people seek out mentors and accountability partners. That’s why people gather together in life groups/small groups to dig deeper into the life giving Word of God. Listen to just a few testimonies from the bible concerning the Word:

6 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

And in Ephesians St Paul calls out the Christians in that place saying, ***“10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes ... 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.***

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The word isn’t just information – it sheds light on the lies of Satan and exposes him as a fraud, a liar and slanderer, but more importantly, it points you to Christ. *It conveys to you the truth of what He has achieved for you on the cross and applies it to your life today – when you need it most.*

The word smashes the lies and condemnation of Satan and assures you that there is in fact NO CONDEMNATION for those in Christ Jesus.

It assures you that you have an advocate and helper in your time of need. One who has passed through the waters of temptation for you and stood firm – obedient to the will of God. ***For you!***

So there is great hope in the midst of temptation – both in the victories and even when we’re lamenting our own failures or working through the impact and consequences of the failures of those close to us.

There is no wound too big for God to heal. No marriage too broken for the forgiving love of God to penetrate. There is forgiveness for the guilt and the shame. There is freedom from suspicion in relationships. There is a fresh start for those who feel as though everything is in ruins. PAUSE

We all have our own set of temptations piled up before us in life. We all stand there, circling that pile like the wolf circles that blood drenched knife in the arctic plain. When you find yourself faced with that bloodied knife in the snow – use the words Jesus has given you: ***“Get out of here Satan!”*** Hold on to that little sentence and speak it when you need it. ***“Get out of here Satan, in the name of Christ.”*** It sends Satan away.

Saturate your life in the Word of God and His promises.

Above all remember that you are not isolated and alone. ***You belong to Christ!*** You belong to one who has succeeded where each of us has failed. And there is nothing and no one who can snatch your life out of His hand.

So don’t lick the knife as alluring as it may seem!

The wolf lay dead in the snow having consumed even his own blood. The people of God shout “Glory!” on account of the blood poured out for them on the cross.

You are alive in Christ – rejoice and be glad.

Amen.

Let’s pray:

We thank you heavenly Father through your dear son Jesus Christ that you have protected us through the night from all harm and danger. And we pray you would keep us this day too from all sin and evil, so that in all our thoughts words and deeds we may please you. Into your hands we place our bodies and souls and all that is ours. Let your holy angels be with us, so that the evil one may have no power over us. We ask in Jesus name: Amen.