

Action 1: To Wait...in other words stop being busy!

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When I say the word Jesus what kind of mental picture comes into your mind? Close your eyes for just a second, don't fall asleep, what kind of picture flashes in your mind's eye at the sound of the word Jesus? Do you picture Jesus (as most renaissance artists do) as a man with long flowing hair, with smooth complexion, with every piece of hair in place, never needing a shave? Or do you picture him walking along the dusty, dirty roads of Galilee, with his feet getting all dirty from his open sandals, his brow wet with sweat from the heat, his clothes wrinkled and worn, his face lined with the signs of age. His hands with callous from working in his father's carpenter shop, and his face with a 5 o'clock shadow? How do you picture this Jesus Christ?? Do you see him as somehow always having a ring of light around his head as Giotto saw him?

Sometimes you and I spiritualize Christ to such an extent, that we forget he was a man, a human being, an historical person who walked this earth who did the kinds of things human beings do. Jesus Christ was true man, and true God. As a man, as a human being he felt, he experienced, he encountered all the emotions, all the senses, all the circumstances that we feel in life. He ate, he drank, he slept, he got dirty, he needed a bath, he prayed, he cried, he gave thanks, he worshiped. Jesus did and experienced all the things you and I experience in this life. And sometimes we do the complete opposite and think of Jesus the man and never give much thought to Jesus the eternal divine. For instance where is he now?

As our gospel text tells us this morning, Christ experienced human feelings such as temptation. Jesus was tempted as you and I are tempted. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by the devil after he had fasted for forty days. Forty days without food or drink in the wilderness that was such a forsaken place that people would avoid it whenever possible. Jesus was tempted by the devil to take the easy way out. He was tempted not so much with doing something evil, but with taking the easy way out. The first temptation was to change stones into bread. This temptation really seemed like a good idea, give the people what they think they need, food. Become the bread, Messiah, feed the hungry people of the world, satisfy their need for the basic thing of life food, then they will follow you, then you will have no problem getting the people to follow. Jesus was tempted with giving the people what they wanted instead of what they needed. Sure the people wanted food, but Jesus knew they needed more than food, they needed his spiritual food, they needed to listen to his teaching not because he bribed them with food, because he offered them life, eternal life.

The second temptation was even more dramatic. The devil asked Jesus to worship him, and then the devil would give Jesus the authority over all the earthly kingdoms. Jesus would be in charge of every kingdom of the earth. Jesus would be our president; He would be the one who would run every country. With Jesus in control of the world's political, military, and economic power, disarmament would be swift, peace would be certain and an equal distribution of wealth would be immediate. Isn't this a great idea? Jesus could take the easy way out, acknowledge the devil's control of the earth, and then he could change the course of history.

But Jesus knew he would change the course of history in a far more dramatic way. He would die on a cross and then his father would raise him from the dead defeating the devil's control of this earth. Then Jesus working through his church would bring peace, disarmament, and an equal distribution of wealth, but all of

this would be a long, drawn-out struggle. Jesus was tempted to take the easy way out, to avoid the cross, and to do the changes of this world himself instead of working through his people, the church. Sometimes this temptation is very difficult for us to defeat. Sometimes it is easier to do things ourselves.

As a parent, when I am teaching the children to do something, it is frustrating watching them try, maybe fail, but then try again to do something that I could have done in just a matter of moments. But if I would have done it for them, would they have learned anything? If Jesus would have worshiped the devil and then been given the authority of the whole world, we would not have learned anything about establishing peace and justice on this earth because Jesus would have done it all for us. Jesus by using his divine nature would have devalued being a human being; he might as well say you cannot really cope with this world unless you are divine. But by his actions he said the opposite, being human is good and you can cope and challenge the difficulties of this world. And after you do one day I will make you part of the divine life.

The third temptation was the most dramatic. The devil had another way for Jesus to serve as the Son of God: "Dive off the temple tower and let God perform a dramatic rescue," This event would show that God could be manipulated to do what we want and need. He is at our service. Such a message would be appealing to the masses, for we like to hear that God will keep us successful and happy. Take the easy way out and have God serve you, Jesus instead of you serving God. Yes, Jesus bargain with God, make deals with him, you be the boss, Jesus, sell God a hill of goods.

Trade with him, show him who is boss you are. This temptation hit Jesus right in the face. The devil tried to build up Jesus' ego. He tried to show him that he can be powerful, he can even control God.

This temptation wasn't really something so evil, not like stealing or killing or things like that, was it. But the subtleness of this temptation is even more damning. For this temptation is asking us to accept our will, our position before God instead of his. It asks us to be a salesman, a trader, a bargainer with God. Well, God will do this if you will do that. Doesn't sound so bad does it? But it is. For this temptation places us in control of our salvation, it places us in control of pleasing God, it places God at our mercy, instead of the other way around. God is the one who is in control, God is in charge of our salvation, God gives eternal life to us as a free gift, not as payment for good deeds.

Yes, Jesus was tempted, tempted not by doing something so awful, but by taking the easy way out. By taking the easy road instead of the difficult road of service, sacrifice and death. But these temptations didn't stop here in the wilderness. Jesus was tempted by the devil to take the easy way right up to the moment of his death.

There is a book entitled "*The Last Temptation of Christ*" by Nikos Kazantzakis. He portrays Jesus as tempted even as he hung on the cross. Kazantzakis' Jesus imagines what life would have been like had he chosen another way. In his coma-like dream, Jesus gets married, fathers many children, enjoys the company of friends and works as a kindly carpenter until he is a white bearded old man. The dream concludes as Jesus is confronted by his disciples. They were decrepit old men. Peter degenerated from a rock to a "sponge full of holes, and the others were spiritless men with "bloated bellies, dangling backsides, and double chins."

Long ago they had given up the fight and their destiny shrivelled into meaningless. In their company was an angry Judas who bellowed the truth about the uncrucified Jesus: "Traitor! Deserter! Your place was on the cross that's where the God of Israel put you to fight. But you got cold feet; and the moment death lifted its head, you couldn't get away fast enough." The rest of the disciples joined in the horrible nightmare. His life had been wasted, for he fell to temptation and avoided the cross. He chose an easier way and it proved to be the way of failure.

But we know Jesus didn't take the easy way, he took the way of the cross, so the closing pages of Kazantzakis' book finds Jesus awoken from his nightmare to find himself on the cross. He is relieved as we are to discover that his crucified state was only a miserable dream. The closing words of the "*The Last Temptation*" lifts high the central feature of our faith: Temptation had captured Jesus for a split second and led him astray. The joys, marriages and children were lies; the decrepit degraded old men who shouted coward, deserter, and traitor at him were lies. All were illusions sent by the Devil. His disciples were alive and thriving. They had gone over sea and land and were proclaiming the Good News. Everything had turned out as it should glory be to God!! He uttered a triumphant cry: "It is finished"

And it was as though he had said "Everything has begun.!"

That brings us to a story about a little boy in a grocery store. The boy was standing near an open box of biscuits. "Now then, my lad," said the grocer as he approached the lad. "What are you up to?" "Nothing," replied the boy: "Nothing?" "Well it looks to me as if you were trying to take a biscuit?" "You're wrong, mister. I'm trying not to."

Do we try to take the easy way out, the way that doesn't seem so bad, but is much easier??? How about it, have you ever hoped or dreamed to win a large sum of money, instead of working for it? Have you ever tried to make a bargain with God demanding that He does things for you?

I think all of us have fallen in this trap of taking the easy way out. Sure our sinful nature tells us that the easy way is the best way, but is it in the end?? The road that Jesus calls us to follow is a narrow road, a road that is not easy, but difficult. A road where we are to follow him instead of ourselves, a road that asks us to sacrifice ourselves, our time and our energy for him. Jesus asks us to travel the hard road, because at the end of that road is our final reward, it is heaven, it is eternity with him.

So, as you are being tempted by the devil to take the easy way, what will you do??? Will you take the easy way, the way of little effort, or will you follow the example of Jesus and take the way travelled by him, the way of sacrifice, the way of service, the way of the cross??

The biggest temptation for many active and dedicated Christians is the temptation to be busy. To rush to respond: in deed or word. To offer God's opinion on the various issues of the day. To justifiably feel concern for others and to quickly act in response.

What did Jesus do when he began his ministry? Faced with social deprivation, disease, inequality and God's chosen nation controlled by a foreign power. Hearing the heartfelt cries of desperation he strode out into a

desert for forty days and waited. Waited for what? A clearer vision of his ministry or to challenge Satan directly? Maybe. I suggest he went out into the desert to wait, to be still for no other reason than it is a good thing to do.

The Anglican Church feels waiting is an important action and has periods of waiting built into its seasonal structure: the purple periods Lent and Advent.

Our first task as we reflect on any vision of Jesus we might have is to decide whether we have a balanced view of his two natures: Divine and Human. We often find that churches emphasis one nature over the other. And our task here at St. John & St. Stephen is to offer a corrective. Some churches centre there life on worship (divine Jesus) while others concentrate on social action (human Jesus).

We will need to rediscover a sense of holiness, to explore otherness and to commit ourselves to reducing our talk in regard to ourselves.

- Which Jesus do you find yourself involved with; the earthly Jesus of the gospels or the invisible Jesus of the future kingdom?
- How would you go about enabling a church to rediscover a commitment to 'holiness'?
- 'In the face of...I can't possibly do nothing?' What is 'doing nothing'?
- Do you find 'waiting' easy?