

“Short Isn’t Always the Sweetest”

Luke 4:1-13

First Sunday in Lent ❖ 21 February 2010 ❖ Year C

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Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I just love a good shortcut, how about you? When I used to commute the 70 plus miles a day to seminary, I was always looking for shortcuts to cut down on travel time. How I dreamed of a shorter route to get me to St. Catharines in say ten minutes instead of the sometimes one hour and a half depending on bridge traffic). Of course it never happened; but despite the impossibility, I still insisted on trying! However, more times than not the attempts ended up taking far longer than if I'd just stayed on course and drove up directly. And you know, now that I think of it, times really haven't changed much either... I'm still looking for shortcut- "or taking alleged little shortcuts" whenever I get in the car... if I take this road I will avoid traffic on Transit, if I take this one I can cut across to Millersport and end up right at UB. It's no wonder that after 11 years, whenever Jenny and I get in the car, she is certain to remind me to just go "right to the destination." Quite frankly, I think she would much rather take public transportation than land in the car with me!

And you know, roads aren't the only shortcuts we dream about either, are they. When you think about it, a shortcut is really any solution to a problem or job that will take less time or energy. When I was in Bronxville I would dream about shortcuts through the wilderness of Greek and Hebrew. How I would wish that somehow, somewhere somebody would invent a machine that would do all the memory work, parsing and tests for me. All I would have to do was push a button, and out it would come. The problem was, I usually spent so much time thinking about and cooking up ideas on how to make the process quicker that in the end I didn't have enough time to finish the required tasks.

Well friends, in the gospel lesson for today we discover another meaning for the word shortcut, and that meaning is temptation. You see, in the Gospel we learn that Jesus is out in the wilderness, and he hasn't eaten for 40 days. Just imagine that, not eating for such a long period of time! And then, to top things off, the devil thinks he's got Jesus right where he wants him. As so, he comes to Jesus and what does he offer? Shortcuts! The devil offers Jesus shortcuts out of his misery. Let's just think about the three of them for a minute:

First, **“If you are the Son of God, make these stones into bread.”** Satan knew that if he could get Jesus to obey him, he would win! And Jesus' coming to the earth to teach us and die for us would be in vain. And so, he offers Jesus a shortcut for changing his condition, for getting out of his weakness in an attempt to convince him that he could bypass all of it; especially, suffering and dying for the sins of the world.. But, Jesus refuses and trusts in the Word.

Then, there was the last of the temptations. The devil takes him up to the top of the temple, and tells **Jesus to throw himself down as a challenge to God.** Well, Satan knew that Jesus went into the wilderness in part to prepare himself mentally for the mission ahead. Now this mission ahead was no easy task; it included being rejected, ridiculed, suffering and dying on the cross for a sin sick world. We know from the Garden of Gethsemane that Jesus had his doubts about the mission and price he would have to pay. Satan knew his worries his doubts and his concerns and so he offers another yet another shortcut. Jump down and test to see if God is sincere in his promises. If you go through will all of the nasty stuff ahead of you, is it really going to produce forgiveness, life and restoration for God's people. So, Jesus Let God prove that he loves you, so that from this day forward you can live in complete confidence and know that your mission will truly benefit the world. Well, to no surprise, Jesus refuses again and trusts in God and his promises.

But, what about that second one, when Jesus is shown all the kingdoms of the world. Friends, here the devil gives Jesus his best shot, making an offer that virtually anyone on the planet would have taken in a flash; **"Look this way, Jesus, and look over there. Everything as far as your eye can see, all of this will be yours.** But here's the catch Jesus, **All you have to do is get down on your knees right now and tell me that I am**

your Lord. That's all you have to do, it will only take you a second, and you get more riches and wealth and power than you can even imagine."

Again, however, to no surprise, Jesus knows that like most shortcuts, it will lead him away from where He needs to be. Again he resists Satan and he trusts!

In all three temptations Jesus is offered a shortcut; he is told by the devil that there are alternatives; easier ways that can be chosen and the easier way doesn't have to include suffering, a cross and death. And can't the same be said about us? Aren't we offered shortcuts and aren't we tempted to believe that we can avoid the difficult road- the road of suffering, the road of the cross?

At times, we, like Jesus, are tempted to test God. No, we don't necessarily threaten to jump off tall buildings so that God will have to prove himself. But sometimes we do other things in an attempt to force His hand. Don't we sometimes wish that God would prove himself to us in trying situations; just give us a sign so that we don't have to wonder about the future anymore anymore. Speak to us in some way to let us know that the illness is going to go away and we can scrap the treatment ... then we will know God, that you are for us and not against us! Sadly, buying into the devil's empty promises, we would just as soon put our faith into some remote possibility rather than to trust in God knowing that He loves us and will provide for us. We would much rather avoid the work, the suffering, and the reality that things aren't going to go just as WE want them to sign on the dotted line for the shortcut!

Truth is the world is full of shortcuts, tempting us at every turn. But most of them, however, have to do with the temptation Jesus faced, high on the mountain. If there is anything we're willing to try a shortcut for, it's happiness, wealth and power and the like. Think about all the shortcuts in our world that suppose to promise these things; shortcuts that promise a quick solution to our money matters, the get rich quick frenzy, there are kids and adults alike who take drugs as a shortcut to happiness. There are the married people who fool around, who are unfaithful to their spouses as a shortcut to physical satisfaction. Sadly, by way of our sinful selves, from time to time whatever's easiest, whatever's the least work, whatever's the most fun, whatever's the quickest way to where we want to be that's what we're interested in. We'll take the shortcut whenever we can.

But you know how it is with shortcuts. We end up worse off in the long run, and we only have ourselves to blame.

Jesus, in our gospel lesson, teaches us that the short way is not necessarily the best way, or God's way. Jesus teaches us that in all things we must first uphold who we are as Christians, and if that means the tougher road, so be it... "Take up your cross and follow me, said Jesus. If it means passing up those attractive shortcuts, then so we must. Living as a redeemed child of God means trusting in faith, it means examining those shortcuts that are constantly thrown our way and considering what they'll mean for us, our families, friends, and our faith down the road.

Friends, Jesus was tempted to take shortcuts, but He knew the craftiness of the devil and He knew that the longer road would be the sweeter road; maybe not for him then and there, but in time; in time, by following through with his mission and not buying into the devil's proposed shortcuts, God's will would in fact be done, the crafty devil would be stomped in victory, and by Jesus' innocent bitter suffering and death and his glorious resurrection, forgiveness and life- now and all the way into eternity would be granted to all who trust in Jesus as Savior and King.

As we begin this Lenten season and as we continue down the path of life, may we always know that temptation flourishes, and the stakes are high. Satan is like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour- that includes you and me! In faith, may you remember that shortest way may not always be the sweetest; sometimes it can be dangerous. And finally, may you remember, too, that in the road of life, Jesus is the only roadmap we'll ever need. When we follow and trust in Jesus, we'll never get lost and we are sure end up in one sweet destination.

In his blessed name, Amen.

