

LENT 1 FEBRUARY 20TH – 21st 2010

Saturday 5-00pm, Sunday 8-00am, 10-00am & Wednesday 11-00am

Luke 4:1-15 Preparing for the way ahead- obedience

Lk 9:23 "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

In the Church year we are in the first week of Lent, 40 days of preparation for Easter. It is a season when we desire to be obedient to Christ's command to deny ourselves.

Generally speaking we abstain from something we like as a form of self denial, e.g. chocolate, ice cream, sugar in our tea etc. I remember my mother telling me when I was only a child that she gave up sugar in her tea as a Lenten discipline and never had it in her tea for the rest of her life.

In February 2008 Barbara and I had a wonderful holiday on Norfolk Island. Whilst there we attended an Ash Wednesday service. The preacher began his message, "I think that God doesn't want us to give up chocolate for Lent. God likes chocolate, He would much rather we give up something He doesn't like." He was obviously referring to sin and that giving up chocolate was only a token act of self denial.

Jesus said, "What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him unclean." Mt 15:11

I am not saying we should not fast from food if God calls us to do so because fasting is clearly a biblical discipline. Fasting from food may not be appropriate for some, particularly those who have a medical condition such as diabetes.

It may be more beneficial for our spirit to put a watch dog on what we feed our minds. I remember one year we turned the television off for the 40 days of Lent. The temptation to watch our favourite programmes was constant but the spiritual

benefits far exceeded the hardship of self denial so much so we are doing it again this year.

Is God challenging you about the discipline of self denial?

If the answer is yes! From what do you intend abstaining?

Temptation.

The message from the gospel reading is saying, 'Beware of Temptation.'

Just like Jesus we face temptation almost every day.

No matter how long we have been a Christian there will always be that constant battle against sin. A simple definition of sin is disobedience to God. We need to be aware that temptation is not sin. The Greek word used for temptation literally means 'to test' more than 'to tempt to do wrong. 'If we understand temptation as a way of testing it will help us change our attitude from one of low resistance encouraging us to sin, to one of increasing our spiritual strength to resist sin. In other words temptation is not meant to enable us to sin rather it's meant to enable us to conquer sin i.e. not weaken us but strengthen us against evil.

Illustration of temptation.

Imagine a door you are told not to open. There is a dog on the other side of the door that keeps insisting, "Come on, let me in. Everybody is doing it. You deserve to have a little fun. Who will know? You can get away with it." So you open the door and the dog roars in and bites your leg and won't let go. Instantly the dog changes it's tune, "You opened the door, I have a right to be here."

Sin which is allowed to reign in your life is like the dog that bites you and won't let go.

If such a thing happened would you punish the dog or yourself?

Too often not realizing there is a dog (sin) we punish ourselves for leaving the door open and cry out to God for forgiveness. God is faithful and forgives us but the dog is still there.

How many of us get caught up in the sin-confess-sin-confess-sin-confess cycle and there is no real experience of victory over sin.

The biblical formula which breaks the sin-confess cycle is – sin-confess-resist.

Jesus resisted the devil when he was tempted in the desert.

We have a responsibility to stand firm in our faith resist the devil and move forward in the confidence that God gives to all who have received Christ Jesus as Lord

James 4:7) "Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

Knowing and obeying God's Word is an effective weapon against temptation.

PREPARING THE WAY AHEAD

We in the Anglican Church of Port Macquarie are not only preparing ourselves for Easter but much more than that. We are learning how to share our faith in Jesus with others. We are being encouraged to be enthusiastic about our faith and to always be on the look out for opportunities to share with others what our relationship with Jesus means for us.

Statement about Evangelism.

"It is easy to determine when something is aflame. It ignites other material. Any fire that does not spread will eventually go out. A church without evangelism is a contradiction in terms, just as a fire that does not burn is a contradiction. Christian Theology in Plain Language, p. 162.

I am so excited in my spirit because we are making a special effort to be more evangelistic in our community. We want to be obedient to Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20, ***Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.....***

If we want to be a church on fire for Jesus, then we must repent of the 'sin of silence,' that is, not sharing Jesus with others. This weekend begins a series of 4 seminars 'Sharing Jesus +Without Fear'

Our identity in Christ.

Before we can share our faith with others we must know who we are in Christ, what we believe and what is our inheritance from God.

2 Corinthians 5:17. ***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!***

Song written by David Ingles 1976 .

"I'm a new creation, I'm a brand new man, old things have passed away. I'm born again. More than a conqueror, that's who I am. I'm a new creation, I'm a brand new man."

Every one born of God is not a wimp submitting to the temptations of the devil but stands firm applying the Word of God in their lives. The truth of our inheritance in Christ is that we share in the victorious life which Jesus won for us on the cross i.e. we are in partnership with Jesus.

Thank You Lord for breaking the power of sin over me through Your sacrifice on the cross. Forgive me the times I fail to resist temptation to follow the ways of the world. I choose to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power I put on the full armour of God in Ephesians 6:10-17, and I resolve to stand firm in my faith and to obey the command to resist the devil James 4:7. Come Holy Spirit fill me with your power to Share Jesus Without Fear from this day forward. Amen .

