

## LED BY THE SPIRIT

Luke 1:1-13

March 9, 2025

In St. Paul's letter to the church in Rome, which we read today, he quoted from Deuteronomy: "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart." And then says: "that is the word of faith that we proclaim." (Rom. 10:8b) Or as I would say to you: this is the Good News I proclaim to you today. Don't let the 'temptation talk' in the Gospek lesson lead you astray. I am talking fundamentally about living a Spirit-led life—Jesus' life and your life today.

Let's look at the context of the Gospel text we just read. In the chapter preceding this one Luke tells us about Jesus' baptism by John. At that event, he tells us, that "the heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him, a voice came out of heaven saying 'thou art my beloved Son'." (Luke 3:21b-22) And then in our lesson today—the very next chapter—Luke tells us: "After his baptism, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness." (Luke 4:1) "Led by the Spirit" is the key phrase. Don't forget this fundamental point; we will come back to it. But now we can talk about 'temptation.'

In order to do this Luke introduces us to the devil. Jesus is the leading actor on the stage; the devil is the supporting actor in the story. For thirteen verses we read the conversation between Jesus and the devil. It's easier to understand the struggle here by looking at the actors' words. The story relates three conversations between the two. The devil suggests to Jesus: 1) that since he is the Son of God he could change stones to bread to satisfy his hunger; 2) that since he is the Son of God he surely wants to be ruler over all the world; and 3) that since he is the Son of God he could surely prove the psalmist right by displaying his trust in God's angels to protect him from injury after he jumps off the steeple of the temple. In each case he does not take the bait. In effect Jesus says that this not the way the Son of God operates. The stones to bread bit challenges Jesus to satisfy his desires on his own or by himself. The rule over all the world bit challenges Jesus to be the powerful king that the Jews hoped he would be. The float to the ground bit challenges Jesus to tell God what he wants God to do for him.

Now let's pause right here. Does any of this sound familiar or cause you to squirm a bit? Let me list them again:

- 1) the temptation to satisfy your desires on your own—I can do this all by myself,
- 2) the temptation to grab for power over others or other things in general

3) the temptation to tell God in your prayers what you want him to do for you. These are fundamental human propensities, or let's call them temptations. And we could add greatly to this list: the temptation to seek recognition or success, the temptation of taking advantage of opportunities or privileges at the expense of others, the temptation to be driven by the desire for success or money, and we could go on.

With this insight, I think we could define temptation as the enticement to sin or to stray from God's will—or to be less than what God created us to be. It encompasses a variety of challenges, including moral dilemma, desires that conflict with God's teachings and trials that test one's faith.

It is time now to look at the challenge that I think we all have with the phrase: lead us not into temptation. We say this almost every time we pray as a faith community and how many times have you asked yourself? Why would God ever lead his children into temptation? Well, let me say this: God would never lead us in to temptation; rather He yearns from the bottom of His heart for us not to be consumed by our human propensities. We need to say this prayer for the very same reason that we need to confess our sins. Of course we don't want to sin any more than we don't want to succumb to temptations. But we need to remind ourselves, not God, that we are and will always be striving for holiness amid the realities of human frailty.

"Lead us not into temptation" is more than a mere phrase. It is a profound acknowledgment of the human condition and the need for divine support.

I began by emphasizing the phrase, led by the spirit. Let's now look at our psalm today for help in understanding what that might mean. We read:

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, abides under the shadow of the Almighty", and

"Because he is bound to me in love, therefore I will deliver him; I will protect him because he knows my name", and

"He shall call upon me, and I will answer him. I am with him in trouble; I will rescue him and bring him to honor." (Psalm 91:1, 14-15) At your baptism you were "sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever. (BCP p.308) You are led by the spirit, if only you will let the Spirit lead. That's what you are pleading, when saying "lead me not into temptation,"—or we might pray "lead me into life led by the Spirit," as Jesus was from his baptism, to the wilderness, throughout his ministry, even to his death on the cross.

When talking about temptation, we're not talking about temptations to give in to selfish desires, but the temptation to deny the person God created us to be—Spirit- called, Spirit-led, Spirit-filled.

In Deuteronomy we read:

“The commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. The word is very near you in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.” (Deuteronomy 30:11-14)

That commandment means to be led by the Spirit. You and I, we are called by God to be the persons He created us to be.

Lead us not into temptation, which would hinder our response to that call.

Say it with me: Lead us not into temptation!

AMEN