

Jesus begins his spiritual journey

Luke 4:1-13

1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." 4 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." 8 Jesus answered him, "It is written,

'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.'"

9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you,'

11 and

'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

12 Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Intro:

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. We are in a time of walking with Jesus to the Cross and Resurrection. The readings and sermons in this time are going to shadow the steps of Jesus. They provide a pattern for our journey as his disciples. He is the pioneer we are his followers walking the journey of life in the Kingdom of God.

- The Good News is that that Jesus' journey, his spiritual adventure on earth among men and women was for us all in more ways than one.
 - In his spiritual journey Jesus went as low and deep as a human being can go before going as high as a human being can go.
 - He went to a sin soaked cross of execution and into the deepest grave to rise to the right hand side of God.
 - He was buried under the weight of all that dehumanizes and depraves to be raised to a new life above it all.
 - He was made a captive of sin so he could triumph over it.
 - Whatever you may be experiencing now, he knew that and more.

Do we recognize the Gospel of Jesus the Pioneer here? He has gone ahead, cut the trail, laid the tracks, planted the signs and now from beyond calls us to follow in his footsteps.

On the six Sundays in Lent the readings focus on this spiritual journey to the cross and resurrection. Today is the first Sunday and we begin by looking at how Jesus began his spiritual journey. Let's just check-in at the very beginning first.

At Christmas we celebrated the way God came among us. We have terms such as 'Incarnation' and 'Emmanuel' to describe the way God became human. God began his personal journey to save humanity and all creation by become a human being, part of his creation. Jesus was born of a woman and raised as a child.

Sometime later Jesus became an adult and as an adult man was ready to face the same spiritual journey everyone of us faces as an adult. That is right, he began life just like all of us and he began his adult spiritual journey at the same point everyone picks up their spiritual journey.

Body:

Before we meet Jesus at the starting line of his spiritual journey into adult life I want to share something about questions and answers. Like some of you, I was raised in a God-fearing, church-going family and went to church based school. That has some big advantages in terms of training and background. However in my experience it also had a certain disadvantage that I worked out around age 15. For me, being raised in a church family meant being given the answers before I had worked out what the questions were. It may have been even more severe in the Roman Catholic Church which has an answer for most things but my religious education seemed to be largely about learning the answers to questions I was not asking. Eventually some of the questions emerged and matched with the answers I had been given. I am approaching 50 and still discovering some the questions.

The great thing about the way Jesus' spiritual journey is told in the Gospels is that for those who know, the questions Jesus engages are clearly the same questions every person faces if they want to progress spiritually through life. These are the questions every young man and young woman needs to face if they want to be productive members of society and use their energies well in life.

So before we trace the first steps of Jesus' spiritual journey we need to hear the questions he is facing and recognize them as our own.

There are three questions we need to face if we want to progress spiritually and live good lives. They are:

1. Who am I?
2. Why am I here?
3. What happens when I die?

Three simple questions that apply to everyone yet seem generally to be harder for males to answer than females. One place you can meet a lot of people who have yet to work out the answer to those questions is prison.

They are not obviously religious questions so even agnostics and atheists may ask them even if their answer may be that there is no answer (and many of you live and work with agnostics and atheists). Whatever we believe about these questions will determine how we live, how we treat others and what we invest ourselves into.

Text

Before he launched into his public career Jesus engaged these questions. They had to be clear about these matters before the pressure came on and we might be found unprepared.

In Luke's Gospel the story begins in chapter 3 vv.21 & 22

Luke 3:21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Without much lead up we are told that Jesus was praying after having been baptized by John in the Jordan. The Holy Spirit was perceived to come upon him and a voice came from heaven telling Jesus whose son he really was.

Father God told Jesus the wonderful news

- that He owned him as a son,

- that Father God loved him very much
- and He was very pleased with him.

This is a Gospel moment writ large. Jesus was being told who he was. His spiritual identity was being made very clear. This is a Gospel moment that we all need. We all need to hear that we are God's loved children in whom he delights. We cannot move very far until we receive that answer to the question; Who am I?

After this Luke colours in the identity question by setting out a record of Jesus' genealogy which comes in to agree with what Jesus heard at the Jordan by saying he was a son of Adam who was a son of God.

This leads into the first part of chapter 4 Luke which shows Jesus engaging the next two questions, Why am I here? and What happens when I die?

The Holy Spirit swings into action and leads Jesus from the Jordan river into the wilderness.

- The Holy Spirit did not lead him to a 5 star hotel with a swimming pool.
- The Holy Spirit did not lead him to a happy home in the suburbs.

Instead the Holy Spirit lead him to a lonely place without food and so Jesus gets very, very alone and hungry to the point where he is famished, starving. At the start of his spiritual journey Jesus is being taken to a place where he can see death. He came close to experiencing what death is like.

- This was the place to decide what his life is all about.
- This was the place to decide where his life energies are going to be devoted.
- This was the place to affirm what he has come to believe about who he is, God's Son.
- This is where he set the course of his spiritual journey.

In Luke's telling of the story the key issue is identity. Does Jesus really know and believe what he has been told about who he is as God's son? Can he remain true to his identity in the face of extreme loneliness and death by starvation?

These questions are posed by way of tests and trials. The Devil come to tempt Jesus away from what he has been told about himself. God has told Jesus he is his much loved son over whom he rejoices. The Devil comes to sow doubt and suggest that Jesus is unloved, abandoned by God and needs to look out for himself.

The first test concerns Jesus' physical nature. He is a mammal who needs calories. Is he the sort of 'son of God' who might forget God's words and arrange his own creature comforts to satisfy his appetites? What is Jesus prepared to do to get bread?

In reply, Jesus quotes a verse from the scriptures, "One does not live by bread alone."¹ In other words, I am not here just to get bread. I am here to live by God's words. The words of Father God are what matter to me more than bread. He is starting to answer the why am I here question.

The second test concerns social standing or status. The devil offers him all the kingdoms of the world. "To you I will give their glory and all this authority" (v.6). The price tag for all this worldly prestige and authority is that Jesus worship the Devil. As Jesus stands alone in the shadow of death by starvation, at the limits of his strength, he defines why he is on earth by ruling out his interest in the kingdoms of the world and all their prestige. He is not interested in the world's power and status. He is interested in heaven's power and status.

He is not interested in worshipping anyone but Father God who loves him and delights in him.

¹ **Deut. 8:3** He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

The third test is a test of faith in God. I could put it this way; Is Jesus going to be a man of religion manipulating God for himself or is he going to be a faithful son of God allowing God to be God? The Devil invites Jesus to presume on God's protection in such a way that all the world would see. Jump off this tower and the world will see God at work. Insidiously, the Devil even quotes two portions of scripture to validate the proposal. Scripture abuse is nothing new.

Jesus has had enough. "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Jesus is not on earth to manipulate the love of God to his own ends no matter what that might achieve. He is a man of pure faith in Father God and not slimy religion seeking power over God and people.

Let's put together the answers Jesus offered to the question: Why are you here?

Jesus was *not* on earth;

1. To get bread, (money, possessions and the satisfaction of appetites are not his purpose)
2. To gain social status, worldly prestige, political power.
3. To manipulate or control God for whatever good purpose he might consider.

He *was* on earth:

1. To live by every word that came from the mouth of God
2. To worship God
3. To trust in God's protection.

Jesus has his answers to the first two questions. He is almost ready to step into his spiritual journey.

One more question: What about death?

This is not put directly to Jesus but the context reveals much. As I said before, Jesus is physically looking at death. The weakness of his starved body is telling him about death. What he does in the face of death is trust his heavenly Father.

For Jesus, the answer to the question (What happens when you die?) flows out of his identity and his purpose in being on earth. He knows himself as God's loved, cherished child and on earth to live by God's words, to worship him and trust his protection. What about death? God knows, God is good and I am his.

When Jesus died Luke's record in [23:46](#) states,

Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last.

As with life, death is a time to devote ourselves to Father God and his care.

Then, after these questions have been answered we are told: (4:13-15)

[13](#) When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time. [14](#) Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. [15](#) He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

Conclusion:

Jesus needed answers to the basic questions of identity, purpose and life in the face of death. Only then could he really set out on his spiritual mission as the Messiah in the power of Father God's Holy Spirit.

It is the same for us.

Appendix

Application:

For us to be Christ-like, to walk as he walked, to die to self and rise to him, we also need to face the same questions.

I believe many of us also face trials in a wilderness of distraction. The world around us does not readily allow empty space and silence for those questions to be faced.

- We are deluged with things and experiences to consume. Being a consumer is a full time lifestyle commitment. Get, Get, Get, Have, Have, Have, Enjoy, Enjoy, Enjoy. We are swimming in information and constant interaction. How can you get to consider who you really are and what your life is really about if you are constantly propelled along by the pace of consumerism?
- We live in a time that has more power over sickness than ever before yet is incredibly uncomfortable about death. Death is a growing taboo for those with no answer to its question. In this country it is so obvious that even the connection between cows, sheep, pigs and supermarket meat is hidden.

In the face of these realities:

1. Can we tell our children and grandchildren who we are both in terms of
 - Knowing ourselves as loved children of God
 - As well as our earthly lineage?
2. Are we comfortable without social status and pride of place and content to be a God worshipper or does part of us still seek recognition from others because we have not yet rested in God's love?
3. Are we content to let Father God be God or do we feel the need to have some special way to earn his attention?