

Sunday, March 1, 2020

Genesis 2:15-17. 3:1-7

Matthew 4: 1-11

### Decisions on the Edge

How daring are you? How close to the edge would you go on a mountain or cliff or even high rise building? Would you consider living or staying in a place that is truly on the edge of the ocean? These photos show a house built on the edge of a cliff (Australia). This house has an elevator to take you down five stories towards the bedrooms but you don't see the water as you go down, only the full ocean view outwards. This is a minimalist home- as you would focus on the ocean for your time there. For some this would be more than close enough but for others it is just not edgy enough!

Our Lenten journey is called "On the Edge of Believing" because there are many situations which call us to wonder about who we are and what we believe when it comes to Jesus Christ. Throughout Lent we are introduced to Jesus as the Son of Man/ Son of God. As a human who is tempted, as the Son of God set to save the world, as well as the one who pushes his followers to learn and grow in faith and as the One who is tried, convicted and nailed to the cross. There are many people who are just not sure where they are with Jesus- as a man or as the Son of God; the one like us but unlike us is God. And for some people they are on the edge of what it is we are to believe about this man of God who taught for months in the synagogue and yet it was those who listened who sought him killed. Just where are you as you hear the message of Jesus—on solid ground, on the edge or still searching?

Our Genesis reading is the story of the Adam and Eve and the temptation they had to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The evil one in the form of the snake is the one who speaks to Eve. He tells her that you're not going to die if you eat the fruit from the tree that was forbidden you. All that would happen is that your eyes will be opened and you be will like God, knowing good and evil. What to do? Eve debated a little bit—the fruit looked good and the desire to make one wise tempted her. She needed to make a decision about whether to eat the fruit or not. She was on the edge of deciding and gave some to Adam to eat as well. They were on the edge of so many things in that moment! They lived in paradise but they did not know it. They did not know what it meant to work or labour, to have to wear clothes or even to have to have need of a shelter. Their food was easily and readily available and yet there was something about becoming like God, becoming wiser, more knowledgeable and this would include knowing the difference between good and evil. They wanted more and so they ate. And

things changed not only for them, but for all of humanity since—evil was in the world, but they came to know it for themselves- They had decided and as a result they were removed from paradise known as the Garden of Eden. And life as they knew it changed. Innocence was lost, and life became labour intensive. From being in paradise- they now lived on the outside and in a new way.

How many times are we tempted each day? Advertising, social media, films, not to mention gambling games, establishments and even bars which line the streets of the city—the temptations are there. But there are also other temptations- buying and selling properties for bigger and better, not to mention the use of illegal drugs, human trafficking, commodity trading and addictions. And even smaller temptations as well—in order to gain more and be better. We may be tempted and we might wonder and explore these things- but do we fully act on these temptations?

After Jesus was baptized and introduced by God's voice- "This is my Son, the Beloved with whom I am well pleased," Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. This was Jesus training camp for what was to come in the next 3 years of his life. He was there and he was fasting during this time. Fasting involved no eating of food but merely consuming water to survive. It is in these 40 days that Jesus merely exists. We don't know what he does, says or with whom he speaks or interacts. All we do know is after the 40 days he is famished. But something occurs—the tempter/ the devil/ comes to Jesus and speaks. What he says to Jesus involves every possible temptation in our lives- which involves food, power and wealth. The first temptation states, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." Don't you think Jesus could have and would have done this in the 40 days he went without food? He had the ability to make food come to him but the wilderness experience was not about his body becoming ready for what was to come but his mind and heart. He could have had food prepared in a variety of ways. But he was not tempted to do this and responds to the devil by quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3 "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." The bread he is referring to here is not to be physically consumed, but to be taken as the teachings of God which sustain us spiritually every day.

The second temptation then takes place on the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem. Satan tells him if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. Psalm 91 says that God will command the angels to look after you and protect you. You will not be harmed. This is a test of power. And Jesus again quotes from Deuteronomy 6:16 Don't put the Lord to the test. For he knew that Satan seeks power and if Jesus had been tempted into action, God may not have

sent the angels into action. But Jesus knew better. He knew not to test the Father. We too are not to test God as we strive to gain power. For if we do, we will gain nothing.

The third attempt by the evil one against Jesus was to take Jesus even higher than the temple's peaks. He was taken to a high mountain where he could see for miles and many kingdoms. Jesus was probably never this high before and had a great view of God's creation! But what the evil one states is that all of what Jesus could see could belong to him if he would just bow before him. Yet Jesus knows that as God's Son he reigns over the kingdoms of the earth already and there was no way he was going to worship Satan. Jesus again quotes Deuteronomy 6:13 which is the teaching of the law stating, "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him." Jesus is not tempted by Satan at all and so Satan pouts and leaves. God is watching all of these things occur and he sends the angels to tend to Jesus' needs- food, water, and care.

We might reflect on these temptations and say that what Jesus was tempted with was not as difficult as the things of today's world. But what are we to gain if we are tempted in other ways? Food- to the point of gluttony, power to what end? And wealth for what? to see the poor become poorer?

We have begun Lent and for some people it is a time to experience the wilderness of 40 days like Jesus did. To truly stop and reflect on Jesus what he taught and did as he revealed himself and reflected God. To understand Jesus we need to go to the edge of wonder and ask how can this be? We might even want to find out what the edges are in our mind and heart, as well as the community in which we live. How far might we go to the edge of reality until we are fearful of the next step?

There is a story of a father and son driving around the city and they are not too sure of where they are. The first neighbourhood is wealthy- as the houses are well kept- neat lawns, painted houses, nice windows- clean streets and really good pavement. They carry on a ways and it is like a step on the wrong side. Junky cars, old machines are on the grounds in front of houses with porches not maintained. No paint has been seen in a long time. The son asks a simple question- what happened to the nice houses? The father's response is simply, we just crossed the edge between rich and poor. But I know where we are. It was not too long after this that the father found his bearings and went three streets over- to the middle class section of the city. A familiar area because this is where they lived. Upon arriving at home, the son said, Dad how come there are poor people, rich people and in between people? Why can't we be equal? The father not really sure how to respond said, simply—It comes down to temptations and acting on them with or without a conscience.

As we journey together this Lent let us be aware of the edges we might see, walk over or even imagine. Let us remember this: Life is a walk to the edge of a cliff. Every day we get a step nearer and what lies over the brink, no one can tell.

Let us remember how Jesus responded to the temptations of food, power and wealth— with God's words of life. And let also remember that we will be tempted throughout our lives. It is up to us how to respond and act. It is up to us to walk the way Jesus taught and to know that we are his through faith. Let us pray

God of grace and love, we thank you for Jesus and how he responded to the temptations of life. Remind us again of our promises to follow His way throughout our lives. Be with us O God as we journey together this Lenten season and help us to remember Jesus' teachings as he prepared others for his death. We ask this in faith and with hope. Amen.