

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD

9<sup>th</sup> March 2025 – First Sunday in Lent

**Luke 4:1-13**

**BE AWARE, BE STRONG, BE WITH GOD**

When you tell people that you have moved here from Darwin, and you tell them you owned a boat up there and enjoyed going fishing, the first question they generally ask you is: Did you ever see any crocodiles? My answer tends to be: sometimes you might see one, but it doesn't matter, because you always know they are there. Unless you go to one of the hotspots you don't tend to see the crocs, because they are so good at hiding; they are perfect ambush predators. A number of years ago our family visited a croc farm in Broome, in WA. The guide took us to an enclosure where we could see a croc sunning itself on the far bank. He said, 'it's not the crocodile you can see you need to worry about', then he threw a large ball into the water of that enclosure, and it was immediately smashed by another croc, which we hadn't seen, lurking in the muddy water. 'No', he said, 'It's the one you can't see you need to watch out for'. Crocodiles are incredible animals, but sadly every year people get taken by them, and I guarantee you they never get taken by one they have seen.

Lurking, hidden, danger. It doesn't just happen in the waters of the Top End, but it's how the devil works in our lives, too, and, just like crocs, he's perfect at it. This is our first Sunday in the Church season of Lent, and we always begin it with the story of Jesus being tempted in the desert at the beginning of His ministry. And that's very fitting, because Lent is a time for us to focus on our relationship with God, and temptations from the devil are a very real threat to that relationship. Like a crocodile, he lurks, he hides, he either overtly or subtly comes in to take us away from God. Because, for a Christian, that's what temptation is: the devil trying to get us to not put God first in what we think, say, or do. These temptations come in many different shapes and forms; some we see, but many we don't see until it's too late, perhaps not even then. But, in being aware, we always need to remember that the devil is actively trying to get us to go against God.

The three temptations Jesus faced in the desert, as we heard them in the Gospel reading, might come across to us as being quite dramatic. There was the temptation to satisfy His hunger by turning stones into bread. Then the temptation to take the glory road by worshipping the devil rather than the road to the cross. And finally, the temptation to put God Himself to the test by jumping off the temple. But how about if we look at them like this: 1) the temptation to fulfil on our own needs and not rely on God, 2) the temptation to go for glory and satisfy our pride rather than serve God and others, 3) the temptation to distort God's teaching and justify our wrongdoing. When we look at the three temptations of Jesus like this, do we find that most, if not all the temptations we face every day can come under these three things? These three temptations summed up what Jesus faced in His battle with the devil throughout His life. They sum up our temptations to go away from God as well.

In the first temptation, Jesus was being hit right where His need was (Satan is good at knowing our needs, and using them against us). He had gone without food for 40 days, and so, to state the obvious, He was hungry. It would have been so easy for Him to turn a stone into bread; He certainly showed in later miracles that He had the power to do this. But to use His power for His own good would have been to fail the test to rely on God and serve others instead of looking out for Himself.

How do we go with this one? Are there times we take the seemingly easier option instead of standing up to the test? Does worship, or Bible reading or prayer, get put aside because we are too busy and can't fit them in? Do we stop trusting God with what we give in our money, our time, our lives, because we worry we won't have enough for ourselves? Do we worry about these things instead of trusting Him? Can't this be such a real temptation for us; to stop trusting that God will care for us as He has always promised to do?

And what about the temptation to go for glory and cater to our pride, is that there at all? What are some ways we might do that? We are called to achieve the best we can with the gifts God has given us, this isn't about that. This is about these gifts taking over and coming before our relationship with God. The thing about this temptation is that it's based on a lie. The devil here, as he did with Adam and Eve, promises that things will be better if we follow him. We know that's not the case,

but how often do we still listen to him? Money and other material things are a gift from God, but do we use them in our service to God, or do they often get in the way of that service? Going our own way inevitably gets us into trouble, but how often do we do it anyway? Jesus here had the choice to take the easy way, the way of worshipping the devil and having power and glory given to Him, or the hard way, the way of the cross, the way which would be hard for Him but would be for the good of us all. Many times in life we are faced with that choice; indulging ourselves for quick, short-term satisfaction, or making the hard choice to follow God, a choice we know deep down is better for us in the end. Not always an easy choice, is it?

Getting down to the third temptation of Jesus, how good does the devil help us to be at this? I always think that we can justify anything if we really want to. Sometimes this can be harmless, like me saying I can afford to eat a chocolate because I took the dog for a walk, but other times it can be very harmful. After Jesus had used the Bible the first two times to fight the devil's temptations, now the devil twists the Bible as he uses it back again. How do we do that? What about when we think that, 'you shalt not bear false witness' doesn't count when our gossip about others contains at least some truth? Or, 'you shall not steal' doesn't really apply to cheating on our employer or the government because they have so much they won't miss it, or they owe us anyway? Or, when I get angry with someone it's not going against the Bible teachings because there is a good reason for my anger? Or, do some of the teachings in the Bible apply to the times back then, but not to us today? I'm sure we could make a long list of the ways we try and justify the things we do.

In a lot of ways, and it seems silly but it's what happens, we try to hide our sins from ourselves and from God; just, like Adam and Eve when they first sinned, try to hide from God. This hiddenness also applies to the way the devil in so many ways hides as he tempts us. In the Top End there were always big campaigns for people to be 'Croc wise'; to know that any body of water, no matter how seemingly small, or safe, could contain a crocodile. For us, as we begin this season of Lent we can say that we need to be 'Devil wise'. How do we do that?

How about it? What are some things we can do to stay aware of the devil, and to help us to stay strong in our relationship with God? We can read or hear the Bible, we can pray, we can remember our Baptism, we can come and receive Holy Communion. These are all things in which we expose ourselves to God's Word, remember and experience His love, receive His forgiveness, and know that we can trust and rely on Him in everything in our lives. They all bring us to God, and through the Holy Spirit help us to stay strong and close in our relationship with Him.

Like a crocodile, the devil is a great ambush predator. He attacks us in our strengths, as well as our weaknesses. He so often works through our feelings, through other people, through other things happening around us, without us even realising it. Jesus showed us that He can and does defeat the devil and stays strong in all that the Father has called Him to do. So, be aware, be devil wise; know that he is there and trying to take you away from God. Be strong, in the decisions and choices you make; think about them and how they reflect who you are as a child of God. And, be with God; know that when we fail the forgiveness Jesus won for us by His strength is there for you. We can't hide from God; the devil tells us we need to, but we don't. God knows everything about us, and yet He still loves and accepts us unconditionally. Like Jesus did as He overcame this and other temptations in His earthly life, be with God; allow Him to hold you and lift you up, especially as you struggle with these things. Use Him to help you win this fight. Amen.

### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION**

- The devil lies in wait to snare us, and uses lies and deceptions to get us to go away from God. What are some ways you have experienced or seen the devil at work?
- Think about how Jesus stayed strong in resisting the devil; stay close to the teachings of the Bible, pray, follow God's will. Add in for us remembering our Baptism and receiving Holy Communion. How do these things all help us to resist the tricks and snares of the devil?
- Are there temptations which you regularly fall to and you find it difficult to resist? Is there a big temptation you have fallen to which still causes you a lot of guilt? Bring these to God, praying for His forgiveness and for His strength in following Him.

Pray: ask for God's strength in helping you to see and resist the temptations of the devil. Pray for God's forgiveness for the times when we do fall to these temptations.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler  
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