# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

**“Jesus’ Use of the Old Testament”**

**Luke 4:1-13**

**September 8, 2019**

Last Sunday we explored a passage in Matthew’s Gospel where Jesus proclaimed that he did not come to abolish the Law of Moses or the writings of the prophets, that is, the Old Testament. He came to accomplish the purpose of the Old Testament which is to bring us back to God, to reconcile the relationship that has been ruined by our sin.

This morning we will read a passage from Luke’s Gospel. Jesus has been baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit has descended on him like a dove, and the Father’s voice has spoken from heaven, declaring: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” Jesus is ready to begin his mission, but there is one who is vehemently opposed to his mission. This one has been fighting against God since before the beginning of time, when as one of heaven’s angels he defied God and refused to bow to God’s will. As a result he was cast out of heaven. He is the devil, and his desire has always been and continues to be the disruption of God’s purposes and the corruption of those who belong to God. I invite you to turn with me to Luke 4:1-13 where Jesus comes face-to-face with the devil

Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where he was tempted by the devil for forty days. Jesus ate nothing all that time and became very hungry. Then the devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread.” But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say, ‘People do not live by bread alone.’” Then the devil took him up and revealed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. “I will give you the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them,” the devil said, “because they are mine to give to anyone I please. I will give it all to you if you will worship me.” Jesus replied, “The Scriptures say, ‘You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’” Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, ‘He will order his angels to protect and guard you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone.’” Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘You must not test the Lord your God.’” When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came.

Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days without food. What do you suppose he was doing during those forty days? I think he was praying and meditating on God’s Word. He didn’t have a printed Bible to read, but he had committed Scripture to memory. As the Psalmist said, “I have hidden God’s Word in my heart.” As he thought about the Word he had memorized, and guided by the Holy Spirit who was in him, the spiritual truth of God’s Word was preparing him for what was ahead. So, when temptation came he was ready to use that Word and to stand strong in the face of opposition. The Word of God kept him on mission. And, so it will for you and me if we pray and meditate on it as Jesus did. Let’s take a closer look at the confrontation between Jesus and the devil.

In the first temptation, the devil challenges Jesus to turn stones into bread. Jesus hasn’t eaten during the forty days and, in classical understatement, the Bible says, “He was very hungry.” As our young people would say, “You think!” What the devil is saying to Jesus is: “Look, God isn’t taking care of your physical needs. Remember your ancestors when they were in the desert for forty years? God gave them mana and quail each and every day, but for you – nothing.” The temptation is to believe that our deepest needs are physical and if God doesn’t take care of those needs when we want him to, we should provide for ourselves. What Jesus has come to understand during his forty days is the application of an Old Testament verse: “People do not live by bread alone.” He has experienced the hunger pains, yet God’s Word has convinced him that the spiritual is more important than the physical. If his heavenly Father has not been feeding him physically, there must be a purpose, and Jesus trusts his Father’s purpose. Jesus remains faithful to his mission.

If physical hunger is not a big deal to Jesus, maybe the hunger for power and wealth will trip him up. In the second temptation, the devil offers him the kingdoms of the world. All Jesus needs to do is worship him. In effect, the devil is tempting Jesus to give up on his alliance with God and to enter into an alliance with him. This, of course, would require the breaking of God’s first commandment which is to worship God alone. Again, Jesus responds with Scripture, quoting a verse from Deuteronomy, making it clear that he will worship and serve God alone. He is keeping his eye on the mission.

“Ok,” says the devil, “If you say you trust God and will only worship and serve him, prove that God is worthy of your trust, worship and service by jumping off the top of the Temple. Doesn’t God promise in his Word that he will send his angels to keep you from being hurt? Let’s see whether you really trust him and whether he really is a God who can save you from death.” This time the devil reinforces his temptation with Scripture of his own. But Jesus knows exactly what the devil is up to. He knows that the devil has read the Bible and will use its words at every opportunity to trip up God’s people. Yes, the devil has read it, but his purpose is always to use it for evil, to twist its meaning for his own purposes. Here, he is trying to get Jesus to do something that God has not asked him to do – that is, to jump off the Temple and put his life at risk – and by doing so put God to the test of whether he really is a good and powerful God.

Let me give you an illustration of what the devil is doing. Let’s say he owns a private plane and offers you a ride. You go up with him and climb to 10,000 feet. He says, “So, you’re a Christian. You know that the Bible says that God can do anything. Do you believe that God can save you if you jump out of this plane?” “Yes,” you respond, “I believe the Bible when it says God can do anything, and I believe he could save me if I jumped out of this plane. But nowhere in the Bible do I find that God has asked me to do so.” The devil may know the Bible, but when you and I know it and are being guided in its use and understanding by the Holy Spirit, he will not be able to use it to trip us up. Like Jesus, we will be able to stay true to God’s mission for us without putting him to the test in order to determine whether he really is who he says he is.

When the devil tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he began by asking them a question: “Did God really say . . . ?” I wonder if things would have turned out differently if Adam and Eve had been able to produce a written copy of God’s Word to them and to respond to the devil with what God actually said. They allowed the devil to make them uncertain about what God had said, and the devil used that uncertainty to bring them to a place of doubting God and then disobeying him.

The Word of God is given to us so we may stand strong in the face of opposition. That is how Jesus used it. Without God’s Word it is easy for us to become confused by what is said and done in the world around us. The devil can use that confusion to divert us from our mission, which is to be faithful followers of Jesus. So, let us commit ourselves to the reading and study of God’s Word, and prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to help us apply it to our particular circumstances that, together with Jesus, we might do the good work that the Father has given us to do.