

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2where 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. 3The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." 4Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" 5Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6And 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. 7If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." 8Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" 9Then 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, 10for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' 11and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" 12Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 13When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.*

I was thinking about raspberries the other day as I was walking – careful to avoid any icy patches along the way. All bundled up my mind skipped forward to shorts and tee shirt weather, and to first red raspberries – plump, sweet, delicious. The first ones are always best – bigger, tastier – later in the season dry weather or fungus will shrivel the berries.

I can't imagine it was any different three thousand years ago when the children of Israel were settled in the land. First grapes from the vineyard, olives from the trees, fruit from the bushes and orchards - even more precious than my raspberries as there was no fresh produce from California or Florida to tide them over during the long winter. First fruits from the ground – the very best – these they were to offer them to God. For Moses had declared: "When you come to the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will chose. You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and your house."

Giving, sharing, that which is most precious.

For forty days no one was giving Jesus anything. Famished is the word used to describe him – more than just hungry. I cannot imagine how precious even a morsel would have been to him at that moment.

“Command this stone to become a loaf of bread,” the devil suggested. All of Jesus’ desire must have cried out to do exactly that but Jesus resisted. He replied: *“It is written: One does not live by bread alone.”*

Bread is good. The other two temptations were also for Jesus to seek good things: Jesus having authority over the world – what could be better? Jesus experiencing God’s help – a good thing.

Temptations are most always to seek something that seems good for us - something that makes me feel better. Whether it is gossip, or getting ahead of someone at work, or telling someone exactly how he or she has offended me – most always we are tempted by something that looks as if it will be good for us. But in so many cases giving in to temptation violates our relationship with someone else.

Follow your heart is the advice that our age would give. Enjoy the fruits of your labor – you earned that enjoyment. If your serving or helping is a burden for you – don’t do it – you should enjoy your free time. Put yourself first – there is no one or nothing more important than you.

Had Jesus made instant bread that day who would have been harmed? No one else would ever know but God. Jesus relationship with God would have been changed. And that relationship was most important of all to Jesus.

I think of the Israelites and their first fruits. By bringing the best to offer to the Lord and to share with the priests and the aliens (they were the lowest members of the society) was all about where God would be in their lives. Sharing was an act of trust – an act of gratitude – an act of hope. Among a people who were often struggling to get by – offering first fruits was a way of expressing that God came first.

In the next two months each of us will have an opportunity to consider a gift to the capital campaign for building additions to our church building. While our giving will not involve bringing some newly harvested raspberries to the church nor being confronted with a choice between listening to God or listening to the devil, still

you and I will be affected by the responses we make. Even more important than how much money is raised is how this whole community of faith is shaped by our response. When we sacrifice for God's work among us all - we are changed by that. Our gifts are a way of expressing that God comes first for us.

Jesus teaches: "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also." Jesus was talking about our wealth, our possessions. He was saying that what we give our wealth to will own our hearts. "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also." When I stand back and withhold myself from God and God's people I am changed by that. When I give myself and what I have to God and God's people my heart is changed by that. That is why Moses commanded the sharing of first fruits – the Lord wanted the hearts of God's people.

At the very center of our faith is a sacrifice – not our sacrifice for God but Jesus' sacrifice of his own life for us. He endured all of the humiliation, pain and loneliness of the cross for you. In investing the treasure of his own life in that sacrifice Jesus' heart was bound to you for all eternity. He would not be the same if he had stood back – talked about his love for us – but not given himself for us. But because he poured out his life for you - nothing will ever be able to separate you from his love.

You and I will not be the same if our faith and love for God is only talk. But as God's Spirit leads us into a life of love and service and sharing we are changed to be more like Jesus. What better thing could you desire?