

MODERATOR'S 2022 SEASON OF LENT MESSAGE



Tensions, temptations & taunts

The temptation of Jesus speaks to me of our human condition stretched to the limit! That in turn speaks to us at this time, as we enter a third Lenten season under the shadow of Covid, with angry protestors camped outside Parliament, hospitality and tourism businesses going to the wall, and heightened anxiety in response to the fast-approaching Omicron wave. We are being stretched.

For us, as for Jesus, there are tensions, temptations, and taunts to cope with.

In my mind's eye I can see the tension on the face of Jesus as he came to the end of his 40 day fast. The biblical text simply says, 'he was hungry'. I read a quirky novel once that went into graphic detail about how a fast this long would actually affect him! The haggard tension on his face from the sustained deprivation would be palpable. We too know tension from sustained pressure. We face ongoing cycles of planning and cancellation, anxiety and relief, hope and despair. Most of us have relationships strained by differing opinions.

At this point of extreme vulnerability for Jesus, he is tempted to take false paths. What are the temptations we face at this time of vulnerability? Early in the pandemic the temptations were around economy verses health. Now it comes to us in the form of demonizing those who disagree with us, and

some proclaiming individual rights versus the good of all. And there are the taunts. The devil saved this best for the last when it came to Jesus – “if you are the son of God...”. I see this kind of behaviour on TV, and I hear it on the deck after a game of golf: politicians mocked and even threatened, police belittled, and school students teased for wearing masks! It is hard to deal with.

So how did Jesus deal with the tension, temptations and taunts? Huge resilience indeed. And the text gives two sources for this resilience, still available to us today. One was the filling of the Holy Spirit. The other, a deep and informed use of scripture that empowered him to combat the misinformed misuse that was thrown at him

As we navigate the tension, temptations, and taunts in our context this Lent, may we too draw on these deep spiritual resources to sustain us.

In a season popular for what we can give up, I have always thought the emphasis should be more on what we can take up! Now, as much as ever, we need to be taking up spiritual practices which allow us to be more and more open to the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit and to the scriptures that carried Jesus through a time such as this.

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