Let Faith Arise: the Worst Temptation

INTRODUCTION

In our worship services we have recently been reflecting on a bold exhortation "Let faith arise". Yet from experience most of us can readily identity that we are not immune to the snare of temptation.

TEMPTATION

So, what is the worst temptation that can challenge a faithful Christian?

Is it a moral temptation; money or power; insincerity or betrayal or self-righteousness?

I want to suggest that the worst temptation for a believer in this complex world today may be exactly the same one which Jesus faced when He spent His forty days in the wilderness.

With Jesus in the wilderness 'the clue' is in the little word "if". It challenged His belief that He was the Son of God.

The barb of the first temptation is clearly in the "if". _**IF** You really are the Son of God._ This taunt lay siege to the very basis of Jesus's faith in His status as the Son of God. Doubt was the issue. Remember that this temptation followed directly from

Jesus' baptism when the Spirit rested on Him and the voice from heaven affirmed Him.

The second temptation implored God to perform a mighty miracle. Again, the temptation questioned the faith of Jesus and called it into doubt. Are You really the Son of God?

The third temptation hinged on the same point. The devil argued: Wouldn't it be wonderful if You, Jesus, could rule the whole world and bring about universal peace and justice.

Yet there was the one major issue at the core of each episode. It was a faith crisis as Jesus was tempted to doubt His status as the Son of God.

OUR TEMPTATION

What about us? What about our temptations today? The insidious "IF" is the most dangerous of our temptations because in many ways it sounds to be most reasonable.

In each of our temptations we are taunted in a way which strikes "below the belt" of our faith. It hits us at the core of our belief. It weakens our confidence as followers of Jesus.

There are many variations, but there is one underlying temptation. "If" causes us to doubt. The moment we fall for this temptation we are in big trouble. When we begin to doubt our adoption as God's children, then we step us into a

quagmire of guilt, frustration, and finally, into the dark-depths of faithless despair.

Our Christian status is God-given, not something we need to prove or earn. Jesus knew Himself as God's Child by the Word of God, not by His own works. He did not have to turn stones into bread or give dramatic signs like jumping from the temple tower, or by ruling the world. He just had to let faith arise, and trust in God whom He knew intimately as "Abba Father".

So it is with us. God loves us in Christ Jesus and names us His children. That is all that ultimately matters, God's love, poured out to the uttermost on the Cross, thankfully overrides our attempts at good works. Our salvation hinges on God's gift, not on our performance.

UNSHAKEABLE FAITH

What are the implications of understanding this "unshakeable faith"? Fall for "if" and we can lose everything. Deny the "if" and we can cope with anything.

In our own discipleship when we allow the tempter's "IF" to undermine our trust in God, our understanding of ourselves, our appreciation of the Gospel and of our mission, then we are indeed in a perilous situation.

The Gospel assures us that no fall from grace is irreversible; no life is forever ruined by our foolishness, yet we "do well" to deny the insidious "IF". And, we need to remember that IF does

not have the final word when we let faith arise. We trust the truth in these words from the Letter of John:

*Dear friends, see what kind of love the Father
has shown us: we are called God's children -
and such we **really are.** (1 John 3:1)*

With grateful hearts we respond, "Thanks be to God! No "ifs",

no "buts", no "maybes". This truly is confident faith and assurance! Therefore, we are bold to declare "let faith arise!" Amen.