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Sermon 27 June 2021

Title: Food for Thought 4 (Fast Food)

- Good Sunday morning to you-- and welcome again to LargsNaz online—we are happy to be with you today and hope that you have been blessed by what you have seen and heard –wherever you are joining us from, those who are here in the UK or all across the globe and those who are joining us for our immersive dining experience at our Sunday brunch-- we are glad that you're here—may God continue to bless all that is said and done and may it be edifying to you and glorifying to God.
- This is the fourth Sunday in our “Food for Thought” sermon series—and we have been looking at scriptures from the Old and New Testaments in which food plays a particularly important role. We began in Genesis, and we saw that when they were tempted by the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Even wanted to make a substitution—they wanted something that was not on God's menu for them. Then in our second week some of the children of Israel who were being led by Moses through the wilderness had a similar desire—they had a craving—a craving not just for meat but also for the past—a pathological nostalgia that as it turned out would cost them their place in the promised land. That was in the book of Numbers.
- And then last week we saw in Matthew chapter 12 how the Pharisees criticized the way that Jesus' disciples satisfied their hunger on the Sabbath—the way that

the Pharisees had put their own rules and regulations and restrictions above the needs of God's people and had stood in the way of God's abundant provision. But we also saw that Jesus let them know that their authority had been superseded, because the Son of Man was the lord of the Sabbath.

- Now today we are going to stay in the gospels as we take a look at part of the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness—and all three synoptic gospels tell us about the way that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted and tested by Satan, immediately following his baptism by John the Baptist. We find this narrative in Mark chapter 1, and chapter 4 of both Luke and Matthew. Luke and Matthew both tell us of three specific temptations that Jesus endures, and it's the first of these three in Matthew's gospel that we're going to be concerned with this morning and in tonight's Second Helping Bible study.
- Matthew 4, verses 1-4, today's scripture, has the distinction of containing one of the Top Ten Most Unnecessary Phrases in the Bible. I would say that it's number 2 among them. This is not an official list, it's just something that I have noticed as I have studied the Bible—and that is that sometimes the writers and editors and translators will include a detail—sometimes a few words, sometimes a whole sentence, but they'll include a detail that makes explicit some point that would have been only implied—but what makes it unnecessary is that the implication is so obvious that the point they make really goes without saying—or it COULD go without saying for MOST readers—but the text makes that detail explicit just in case some reader at some point somewhere isn't paying close enough

attention and misses what is being implied—what COULD have gone without saying.

- Let me explain what I mean by sharing with you what I consider to be the NUMBER ONE Most Unnecessary Phrase in the Bible—it’s a whole sentence in the King James translation, and it’s found in Judges 4, in the story of Jael and Sisera—here’s a painting from the 1700s that shows Jael in the act described in verse 21. There we read this: 21 “Then Jael . . . took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary.” That’s not the unnecessary part yet—the part that really could go without saying is the next sentence, after we’re told that Jael took a tent peg and drove it through Sisera’s temple and into the ground, the writer gives us this detail just in case anyone has missed the implication of Jael’s actions—just to make sure we’re clear about what’s happening—and that sentence is this: “So he died.”
- Just in case you might be thinking, “Well, maybe he could pull through,” or “I bet that hurt—I wonder if he was alright—is having your head nailed to the ground with a tent peg always fatal?”
- And Matthew includes that kind of detail here in his gospel when he tells us about Jesus in the wilderness—he provides us with a detail that really COULD go without saying, but Matthew makes it explicit just in case there’s anyone who might miss it—I like the way the NIV puts it in verse 2—the NIV reads beginning with verse 1: “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights—wait for it-- he was

hungry.” The NRSV that Pastor Tasha read for us says: “He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.”

- Matthew includes that detail just in case somebody somewhere wonders whether, after doing without food for almost 6 weeks, after not eating a thing for a month and ten days, whether Jesus would be hungry or not—and frankly it was probably a good idea because in my experience if Matthew hadn’t made that little implied detail EXPLICIT, somebody somewhere probably would have said—“but how do we know Jesus was hungry after fasting for 40 days and 40 nights? Matthew doesn’t say he was. He might not have been.”
- And so Matthew prepares for such an eventuality, he makes sure that any astute hermeneut who might read his gospel would not be confused by telling us clearly that Jesus WAS hungry—the Greek there is *peinaó* and it means to be hungry or needy or to desire earnestly—so after 40 days and nights without food, Jesus was not just hungry, he didn’t just WANT to eat, he NEEDED to eat—after a month or so the effects of starvation start to take a severe toll on a body, and so Jesus is getting into that danger zone—and so when the devil tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread Jesus is not being tempted by something that he doesn’t have much interest in, or that he doesn’t have any use for, something he could do without—he is being tempted by something that he both earnestly desires AND needs desperately.
- But despite his hunger, Jesus doesn’t say to the tempter, “Hey that’s right—I’m the Son of God after all—I can turn water into wine and make the lame to walk again and cause the blind to see—I should just whip up a little snack because I’m

starving. I'll just turn these rocks into a couple of morning rolls—they'll be nice and warm out here in the sun and I'll just have a little breakfast."

- No, what Jesus does is to quote scripture to his tempter—he refers to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 8, and says "'It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"
- And that is where our scripture for today ends. After this, of course the devil tempts Jesus two more times before leaving him, and then Matthew tells us that angels came and took care of Jesus—served and waited on him.
- But I'd like to take a little while this morning to consider just these first 4 verses of Matthew's fourth chapter, and I want to suggest three things about which this short passage of scripture can teach us.
- And the first is this—these 4 verses can teach us something about preparation. Preparation.
- Now, the earthly ministry of Jesus of Nazareth lasted about 3 years—the time from Jesus' baptism to his crucifixion and resurrection—just a matter of months really—and when you consider the enormity of what Jesus was called to accomplish—ushering in the Kingdom of God and redeeming the world—three years is not a very long time at all. Tasha and I have been here in Largs just over two years and we feel like we are just getting started—but 2 years represents 2 thirds of Jesus entire ministry—for comparison, my Dad has been in the ministry for 70 years—and there are pastors who have been at a single church for decades—but Jesus had about 3 years to fulfill and accomplish the goals of his earthly ministry.

- And so you would think that he would stay busy interacting with people and preaching and teaching and healing and proclaiming the good news every single minute from the time his ministry begins—immediately following his baptism—but the very first thing Jesus does is to go, by himself, into the wilderness to be tempted for FORTY days—you might think he couldn't possibly spare 40 days given the fact that he's only got 3 years to do his work—but no, the first thing Jesus does is to take 40 days to prepare for what is to come.
- The word that Matthew uses to describe Jesus' temptation in the wilderness not only means "to tempt," but it also means "to test" or "to prove"—and these 40 days in the wilderness are a time of testing, of proving, Jesus' readiness—and that makes sense -- tests are still used today to determine whether a person has the qualifications to undertake a particular role—we have to pass tests before we go to university, before we go to medical school, before we're certified as a physician or a lawyer or a plumber or a bus driver—am I'm certainly glad that our Nazarene district takes seriously the preparation and testing necessary before a person can become an ordained minister—and so these 40 days in the wilderness are a test that serves to prove that Jesus is prepared for what is to come—and his preparation is not just 40 days long—he has been preparing for some 30 years beforehand—that's a long time to have to wait to get started on something as important as Jesus' ministry
- I believe that part of the reason Luke tells us about Jesus staying behind at the temple when he was twelve years old—that's in Luke chapter 2—where Jesus scares his parents, particularly his mother, half to death because they don't

know where he is for 3 days and they find him in the temple where he says he needs to be—I think part of the reason Luke includes that detail is to illustrate Jesus' eagerness to get his ministry started—he's in a hurry to get to work—but after his mother lets Jesus know how freaked out she was, he goes back to Nazareth with his parents, and Luke tells us that he increased in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favour—now think about that—sometimes we tend to think of Jesus as being perfect from birth, but Luke clearly tells us that Jesus had some growing up to do—that he needed to learn how to get along with people and to INCREASE in wisdom—that means he needed to get wiser—and that means that as he got older he could look back at things that he might have said or done—like panicking his mother by staying behind in Jerusalem—that could have been done more wisely—with more wisdom—even things that he might have thought were foolish—that is what it means to increase in wisdom

- And if Jesus needed 30 years plus an additional 40 days to get prepared for the work he was called to do, if he needed time to grow and increase in wisdom, what does that say to us when we are tempted to look back on our own lives and things we might have said or done and be embarrassed or feel overly guilty about them? What does that say to us when we think we might not be up to the task that we are called to? When we feel inadequate or foolish or naive—when we suffer from imposter syndrome? These verses remind us this morning that Jesus himself spent most of his life in preparation for the ministry and the work he was called to—so don't you think each one of us is going to need some time to grow, and learn, and develop, and become prepared for what we are called to? If

you look back at things you've done and feel unworthy, feel ashamed and incapable—just remember and determine that you are getting better and better as you let God transform and empower you—be reminded that you are increasing in wisdom and in divine and human favour—that you are preparing for the tests that will prove your fitness to fulfill the call that God has placed on your life.

- Jesus' temptation in the wilderness can teach us something about preparation.
- Secondly, these verses from Matthew's gospel have something to teach us about Provision.
- During the first 2 weeks of this sermon series we saw the folly of finding fault with God's provision, with judging what God has provided as lacking and taking matters into one's own hands—we saw that Adam and Eve had been provided with all of creation to meet their needs and satisfy their appetites—but that wasn't enough and so desiring equality with God, they yielded to temptation as the serpent suggested—and then when the children of Israel had passed through the waters of the Red Sea and were wandering in the wilderness for 40 years before they got to the promised land, God was feeding them, providing for them with manna from heaven but for some that was not enough and they demanded more
- And today we see Jesus being tempted, as Adam and Eve were, to take matters into his own hands—to demonstrate his equality with God in order to satisfy his appetite—and, like the children of Israel, Jesus has emerged from the waters of

the Jordan to spend 40 days in the wilderness, and he too, is hungry—
famished—he has a craving—

- But unlike those folks in Genesis and the book of Numbers, Jesus doesn't yield to temptation—Jesus is the one, Paul said, who doesn't consider equality with God a thing to be grasped—he humbles himself and refuses to create for himself what God has not provided—Jesus is demonstrating his humanity here—and he's not just demonstrating his humanity by refusing to transform these stones into bread, he demonstrates it in the way He answers the devil's temptation as well—
- Now Jesus could have just made a statement—he could have just SAID “one does not live by bread alone” and it would have carried the weight of a decree by the Almighty, it would have been the WORD of GOD, because that is who Jesus is, after all—but Jesus doesn't just SAY that—he doesn't just SAY anything—he says “it is written”—and by saying “it is written” he is deferring his own authority to the authority of scripture—this is the way we saw Jesus respond to the Pharisees last week when he said “Have you not read. . . ?”
- And so Jesus provides an example for us when he doesn't simply make a decision and a declaration, but he refers to the Holy Scriptures—and likewise we don't just make our own rules or our own judgments about the way things are based on what we think or what we want—we turn to the scriptures as well—Here Jesus is humbling himself and accepting God's provision without critique or modification—here Jesus demonstrates his dependence on God—his humanity—by not considering equality with God a thing to be grasped IN TWO

WAYS—by not making bread just because He’s hungry AND by referring to the Scripture and not his own judgement

- And the scripture that Jesus refers to is no coincidence: ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” By every word that comes from where? Our own mouths? Our own judgements and our own appetites and our own desires? No one lives not only by bread, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.
- Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 8 here—and it’s not surprising that the context of Deuteronomy 8 is a commandment to the children of Israel who are about to leave the time of testing that they’ve experienced during those 40 years in the wilderness and enter the promised land—a commandment that once they inherit the abundance they have been promised, they should not forget the way that God freed them and has provided for them in the wilderness—Deuteronomy 8:3 says : He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna . . . in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.
- These verses have something to teach us about provision.
- And finally, these verses have something to teach us about priorities. Priorities—the way we prioritise things—the way we determine how important one thing is compared to another.
- Now we have established that after fasting for forty days and nights, Jesus is hungry—he is famished—in fact he is starving—he is dangerously in need of food—getting some sustenance, some nourishment, is a priority for Jesus—it is

on the TO-DO list—eating is a thing that needs to be done by Jesus in the fairly near future or he will not survive—that’s just a fact—but even though eating is A priority for Jesus—it is not as MUCH of a priority as it is that He NOT yield to the temptation of the devil—that he not assert his own will over the will of God or put his own needs and desires over what God calls for at this particular time—because this is a time of testing—this is a time of trial—it is not a time to feast or a time to celebrate—it is not even a time to eat—it is a time to wait upon the Lord--as Deuteronomy 8 reminded the children of Israel, things will be abundant in the promised land, but when you are in the wilderness you wait and you depend on God’s provision—you don’t demand something else to satisfy your cravings

- But you might be thinking, “but last week when the disciples in that cornfield were hungry, they satisfied their hunger even though they were breaking the Pharisees’ Sabbath restrictions”—and that is exactly right—because their need, their hunger, the necessity of nourishment for them outweighed the need to follow the Pharisees’ regulations—their needs were the priority, not the letter of the Law
- But here, in chapter 4 of Matthew’s gospel, satisfying his hunger is not Jesus’ priority—this is a time to fast
- Later on in Matthew’s gospel Jesus and his disciples will be asked why they don’t fast—that’s in chapter 9—and Jesus will be called a glutton and a drunkard because he eats and drinks with questionable companions—because just as there is a time to fast, there is also a time to feast, a time to celebrate

- And there is an important message there about the Christian life, it seems to me, because the Christian life, the kind of life that we are called to when we decide to follow Jesus, that kind of life is not ALL fasting, it is not ALL self-denial and sacrifice and discipline and restraint—but on the other hand, the Christian life is not all liberty and feasting and celebrating and freedom, either—there is a time to fast, and a time to feast
- But how can we know what is called for? How can we know what our priorities should be at one time or another? Well, that all depends on where we are—whether we're in the wilderness or in the promised land—whether we're in a place of trial and testing or in a place of abundance and grace. And how do we know that the place we're in is the place we ought to be? We look to the example of Jesus—and in verse 1 of today's scripture we read that Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness
- Jesus was led BY THE SPIRIT into the wilderness—and we can be led by the same Spirit that led Jesus through his days of preparation, through his days of temptation, through his days of ministry right up to the cross and the grave, the same Spirit by whose power Jesus rose up and defeated death and all the powers of Hell-- and if we are led by the Spirit we too can know that where we are is where we ought to be—whether it's a place of sacrifice, a place of need, a place of deprivation, or a place of plenty—whether it's the wilderness or the Promised Land. As the Apostle Paul says in Philippians 4, "I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned

the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

- I am thankful today for the assurance that as we follow Jesus, God will prepare us, God will provide for us, and God will shape our priorities, as we are led by the Spirit, through the wilderness and into the future that He has promised for us.