

John Bailey wrote, "I am sure that the part of road that most requires the most illumination is the point where it forks."

He's right, isn't he? There's no place on our life's journey where we need more light than when we come to some crucial fork in the road and we must decide which direction we are going to go.

Do you remember the story of the woman who was trying to get into a parking space in a heavily congested lot one Christmas. She tried to manipulate her beautiful, long, sleek Cadillac, but couldn't quite get the angle needed to squeeze into the space. Finally she backed a good distance back, and swung out as far as she possibly could. But then, just as she was ready to point the nose of her car toward the space, a young guy in a bright little sports car zipped in ahead of her and got the space for himself. You can imagine this really upset the woman. She shouted out the window to the young guy -- **"You know I was trying to get that space -- why did you do that?"**

He just smiled and waved and said, **"Because I'm young and fast!"** And with that, he disappeared into the store. A little bit later as he was shopping, he heard a horrible crash and banging going on outside. He rushed to the front window to see what was going on and behold, this old lady was ramming his little sports car with her big Cadillac. She would run into it and back up and run into it again. She did that repeatedly, repeatedly -- **crash, crash, crash.** The guy went running out of the store and shouted, **"Hey, why are you doing that?"** The woman responded, **"Because I'm old and rich!"**

Now whether we are young or old or rich or poor, it makes no difference. We all have the freedom to express ourselves in whatever way we choose.

But the issue is beyond the freedom to express ourselves. **It lies in the question: HOW DO WE EXPRESS OUR SELVES? When we come to those forks in the road to which we all come -- forks that determine our direction and destiny, how do we choose?**

Jesus came to that fork as he began His public ministry. We read the story for our scripture lesson today -- the familiar story of the temptation of Jesus.

To set the stage, Jesus gives us two dynamic phrases -- those phrases are in the first two verses: "Led by the Spirit"...."Tempted by the Devil."

Listen to the way Luke says it: **"Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness...where for forty days he was tempted by the devil."** (Luke 4: 1,2A NRSV).

Now look at the way Matthew puts it in Matthew 4: 1. **"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."**

Matthew's rendering would indicate that the Spirit led Jesus in the wilderness in order that He might be tempted by the Devil. I wanted to share both those renderings because we sometimes think that's the case with us. We think that the Spirit deliberately leads us to be tempted.

I personally do not believe that is the case, but Matthew's rendering makes a big point. None of us are free of temptation. **Even when we are, and are seeking to be led by the Spirit, indeed, even when we feel we are led by the Spirit, still we are tempted by the Devil.**

The big question -- when we come to THE FORK IN THE ROAD...Are we going to follow the leading of the Spirit, or give in to the tempting of the Devil?

#2. Jesus' first temptation was to attend to his physical needs and DISREGARD THE SPIRITUAL. He had fasted for 40 days and 40 nights and He was hungry. So the Tempter came to Him, saying, **"If you are the Son of**

God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

When we come to a fork in the road -- that may be our temptation -- to attend to our physical needs and disregard the spiritual. Unless we have disciplined ourselves and attended to our spiritual needs in an ongoing way, settled some issues in our life prior to coming to that point, **we may give into the Tempter.**

"Dan Louis, of The United Methodist Reporter, talked about an experience he had one morning while listening to a radio talk show. He said that the announcer informed the listeners that the tenth person to call in that morning would receive \$1,000 in cash, the ordinary ploy used by many stations to build their listening audience. In a few moments, sure enough there was a winner. The announcer immediately "went live" and began interviewing the young woman on the phone. "What's your name? Do you realize you've just won \$1,000? How does it feel?" and so forth. But then he asked a question that broke the whole thing open. He simply asked, "What are you going to do with the money?" Dan Louis said he was totally unprepared for the young woman's answer. This is how Louis describes it. *"Without hesitation," he wrote, "she responded by saying, 'well, of course, the first \$100 goes to the church.'* His surprise at her answer was enough that he only vaguely remembered how she said the balance of the \$1000 would be spent. He was impressed by the tithe commitment, but more than that, it was the self-confident, no-deliberation, no-reservations way in which she said 'of course the first \$100 goes to the church' that really had the greatest impact upon him. There was no self-righteousness in her voice, just a simple matter-of-face tone as if to say, *'Isn't that what everyone would do?'*" And then Louis concluded, **"It was a natural thing for her to do. Any money that flowed through her life, a portion of it flowed right to the kingdom of God. No question about it at all."**

What had happened with that woman was that way back, long before this experience, she had come to terms with who she was and what were her deepest values. That is essential for us. **Because at the forks of the roads of our life, we will be tempted to give attention to our physical needs and disregard the spiritual.**

Now move to the second temptation. It was really a temptation to TEMPT THE LORD. Let's read verses 5, 6, and 7: *"Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And 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. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."*

How did Jesus respond at the FORK? Listen: *"It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"*

Do you see how smart and subtle Satan was. He even quoted Scripture to Jesus. He appealed to Jesus' trust in God and offered Him the opportunity to prove his trust -- even offered Him the opportunity to show others that the Lord can be trusted. **It was a temptation to tempt the Lord.**

Now, you think that's foreign to you? See how that temptation expresses itself in our lives when we are at a fork in the road.

First, there is the temptation to do nothing-- just let the Lord make the decision.

Isn't that a common temptation? I see it all the time WHEN I COUNSEL OTHERS. People will come up against a thorny issue in life -- the direction is anything but clear -- there doesn't seem to be a clear yes or no -- there's no easy settling of the problem. And I see people all the time just simply giving up and saying, **"I'll let the Lord decide."**

Now I don't want to diminish the meaning of waiting on the Lord. But waiting on the Lord does not mean total passivity on our part. **The Lord expects us to grapple with issues.** The Lord expects us to use the resources that He has given us. The Lord expects us to engage ourselves in Christian conferencing with others -- seeking to discern what His will is. Discernment comes as we struggle, as we engage ourselves in the dilemma; discernment often comes when we make a decision to act, confident only that we have made the very best decision we could make -- not confident yet that it is all together what the Lord would have us do. Then we discover in the midst of our acting, the guidance of the Lord. **Sometimes we must step into the river Jordan before the waters will be parted.**

So, we are tempted to tempt the Lord by doing nothing. HOWEVER AS BELIEVERS OF THE LORD, HIS

HOPE, HIS EXPECTATION IS THAT WE DO "SOMETHING."

Then there is the temptation to want the Lord to prove Himself. I also see that going on all the time. People want the Lord to prove His presence, to prove His power, to prove His love.

That temptation is tied into our being ATTRACTED TO THE SPECTACULAR.

Have you heard the story about the lion who was stalking through the jungle looking for trouble? He thought he was really something. The king of the jungle. The greatest beast of the wild. And he wanted to make sure everyone else thought that as well. He grabbed a tiger who was passing by. And he put a strangle-hold on him. He growled ferociously and said, "Who's the king of the jungle?" And the tiger, trembling and shaking, said, "You are, o lion. You are the king of the jungle!" Then there was a bear that passed by. And again the lion grabbed him, and put a strangle hold on him and growled ferociously, and said, "Who's the king of the jungle?" And the bear too, trembling like the tiger, said, "You are, o lion. No question about it. You are the king of the jungle!" And then the lion came upon a mighty elephant, huge, massive, towering many feet above the lion! And once more he asked with a ferocious growl, "Who's the king of the jungle? Who's the greatest beast of the wild?" And the elephant didn't say anything. He just picked up the lion with his trunk, whirled him around several times, and smashed him into a tree. As the lion got up, broken and bleeding, he said to the elephant, "**Look man, just because you don't know the answer is no reason for you to get so rough!**"

We have to be very careful that we don't try to tempt the Lord by always wanting Him to prove Himself.

Now, the final temptation of Jesus. It was the temptation to WORSHIP LESSER gods. That happens to us when we come to a fork in the road. Satan said to Jesus that He would give Him the Kingdoms of the world if He would fall down and worship him. But Jesus responded, "*Get away from me -- get away from me, Satan -- for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.'*"

We need to remember that as we stand at the fork of our roads. We have made the decision and the commitment that to worship God is the ultimate call of our life. Then, though it may not be easy to follow the decisions that we make, we will be clear in our direction.

Leslie Newbigan was the Bishop of the Church of South India, and one day he preached at a University in Scotland. After the service was over, some students remained to ask him a few questions. One of them said, "*Bishop Newbigin, I didn't expect to hear such a SIMPLE MESSAGE from you this morning. You've traveled all over the world and yet all you talked about was Christ. Why didn't you bring some light from Mohammed or some inspiration from Buddha?*" And Newbigin looked at the young man and said, "*Are you a Muslim?*" And the fellow replied, "*No.*" "*Well then,*" "*are you a Buddhist?*" And again, the young man replied, "*No, I'm not.*" And then Newbigin said, "*If you're not a Muslim and not a Buddhist, what are you?*" And the young man stammered around a moment and then said, "*I don't know. I guess I'm supposed to be a Christian.*" And I like what Leslie Newbigin said to him then. He said, "*You know what young man? If I were you, I wouldn't worry too much about Mohammed or about Buddha until I had made up my mind about Christ. Depending on what you do with Him, your path in life will then take shape!*"

That's the way it must be with you and me. When we come to the fork in the road of our life, if we have made up our mind about Jesus, then the turn we are to take will be clear.

Remember what I said in the beginning -- the word of John Bailey? "*I am sure the part of road that requires the most illumination is the point where it forks.*" **THAT WILL ALWAYS BE TRUE.**

So, remember, when you come to a fork in the road, do as Jesus did. HOW?

#1: Don't allow your physical needs to cause you to disregard YOUR SPIRITUAL ONES. #2: don't be tempted to tempt the Lord by doing nothing, or by wanting Him to prove himself. #3: Don't find yourself worshipping a lesser god. **AND remember a Good Life calls you to commitment yourself to worship the Lord your God and to serve Him only. Amen.**