

Prefation and Houghton.

Scripture, Luke 2⁴¹⁻⁵² Mt. 4¹⁻¹¹

Text, Luke 2, 52

Even the most careful observer cannot fail to distinguish a difference between a reformed or converted man like Paul for example, and a man who by a steady and natural process of growth slowly evolves a full and rich life which expresses the divine nature within him, such as we see in the life of Jesus. However much a man may think himself entirely reformed, and made new by his conversion the fact still remains that he is the same person with precisely the same former and characteristics as before. The only difference is that he has changed ideas. In stead of

following a flitting firefly of chance desire,
 or indeed some fixed star that is enormous
 he is directing his course by a fixed and
 true star. The reformed life must subject
 itself to the forces of education, and growth
 before ~~there~~ the reform becomes a lasting
 and permanent force for good. Paul, after
 he had seen his vision went away into Arabia
 for a period of three years in which to grow,
 develop, and revolve himself to the con-
 ditions and standards of his new conception
 of truth. The necessity of education, instruction
 and a thorough process of growth as a logical
 supplement of all reforms which in any way
 take on that rather spectacular transformation
 by conversion, has not always been

recognized, and consequently we have to
note the lack of lasting results in religious
revivals and elsewhere. The former of Paul
rests not in the fact of his conversion, but in
the fact that he grew and developed into the
fulness of the ideal that came to him at the
time of his conversion.

In Jesus we have a life apparently free from any
great catastrophic transformation, marking the
dawning of a new truth. Like the seed that expands,
breaks its shell, takes root, unfolds its leaves
throws its blossoms, and produces its fruit
in the very soil where the wings of the wind
chanced to leave it. so Jesus grew and
developed, and unfolded his great life in
the soil of Palestine, absorbing all the

great truths of the life about him, he interprets them in his life of a natural unfolding of the human soul. He stands for us as the most satisfactory type of a man whose life manifests itself as a steady process of evolution. Our interest to-day is to discover the method of that life of growth.

In the Calendar of the Ritualistic Church, this day is designated as the First Sunday in Lent, and is in theory the first Sunday of a period of 40 days of fasting and prayer which are observed in memory of the forty days temptation of Jesus, the account of which we read as a part of our scripture lesson. Of course the language of this account with its highly imaginative character

and its almost poetic setting precludes the possibility of its being a literal and accurate account of an event in the life of Jesus, and yet the very loftiness of the language, and the greatness of the conception indicate that it pictures an event of no small significance. But what is, in reality, the event that is back of this dramatic picture? Should we go back to that story in the life of Jesus that is given us in the Gospel of Luke, and is made for ever graphic for us by Hoffman's famous painting, and try to revive what this day in the temple with the Doctor meant to the youth. I think that we should find that on that day there came in the mind of the boy the first seeds of worship.

Deeply influenced by the life of the wise looking,
kindly old doctor, the boyish mind first
framed the thought, as many a boy had
done before, and many a boy has done since,
"that is the kind of a man I should like to
be, that is the kind of a work I should like
to do." It was the mind of an affectionate
mother ~~which~~ that put into the mouth of Jesse (as
he described that event) Jesse's reply to his
parents. "Will ye not that I want be
about my father's business." He understood that
from that day, the boy had reached to 12, and
the youth with new hopes, and new ideals had
come into being.

But such a thought, as a seed put into, taking
root in one original mind like Jesse, must of

been first, struggled with poor furniture. For
 eighteen long years, as the youth grew up into
 manhood, working daily at his carpenter trade
 observing keenly human nature. Thinking
 deeply, and sympathetically of the great
 problems of human life, and entering into
 the great hopes, aspirations and fears of the
 human soul, that seed grew and shaped itself
 until one came upon the midnight hour, ready
 to begin his public ministry. He was a great
 prophet, he understood as no one else understood
 that the truths that welled up in his soul, and
 fed him with the bread of life were not
 those traditional, formal statements that
 he was accustomed to hear in the synagogues
 and at the temple. He understood that on

he placed the value of a human soul far above
 any formality of the law, his teaching went
 bringing him into disrepute with the teachers
 of the law, and the followers of the law. John
 the Baptist seems to have had of understood
 their same power for truth in Jesus, when he
 says "There comes one after me whose shoes
 I am not worthy to bear." Thus as time
 went by the great prophet, whose mind contained
 the truth that would shake the world of his
 times to its very foundations, came down to the
 river to be baptized by John the Baptist in the River
 Jordan, and then to take up his public ministry.
 Being a great deep man, understanding the temper
 of the times, and his own truth, just as he
 is about to turn away from the great simple

simple life as a carpenter in ^{wyometh.} ~~Potatoes~~, and to
 take of his work as a public teacher and
 teacher, he halts, hesitates, for a moment
 at the threshold of his new life, just as you
 and I halt and hesitate as we come to the
 time when we must leave old home surroundings
 with all their endearing ties, and turn to face
 the world unknown and there to do our part in
 the world's work. With longing he looks back
 over his shoulder, and remembers the quiet
 peaceful days when he went about his
 work thinking high thoughts, drinking in
 the beauties of nature, and living in the
 very spirit of God. With hesitation he
 peered into the unknown future, and saw
 there the hardships, the possibilities of defeat

the offerers, the turmoil, the strife, and he stops overawed by the tremendousness of his the decision that he must make. On the one hand peace, quiet, love, and God, on the other hand hardship, struggle, possibly death, and God. Which must he turn to? It is the old question of the world and the individual, self culture or service. This is the moment in Jesus life, that is here pictured in the story of his temptation, and that is honored and remembered in certain churches by the formal forty days of prayer and fasting.

The great intent of this dramatic moment of Jesus life when he stands before the world to decide between self and duty, rests in

the fact, that it is a universal experience. Every human soul is called upon to face the great temptation and to decide either one way or the other. Again it is of special significance in that Jesus withstood the temptation, and faced his duties to the world with a brave and resolute heart. Deep in our own natures there is a constant and ever present prayer, that to us also may be given the power to resolutely face the problems of life, and feel the presence of ministering angels, who feel satisfaction in our victory.

He won the victory, but when and why did he win it? Surely not at the moment of temptation. We go to a concert, and listen spellbound to the wondrous performance of a great orchestra playing some

great musical conformation. A hundred
 men working harmoniously together
 execute in perfect time, and with the greatest
 variety of expression which thills our very
 soul, some great masterpiece. We are quite over-
 formed in thinking that such a perfect piece
 of work can be done, and in our admiration
 we think it well nigh a miracle, and it is.

But we forget that we are but seeing the
 final product of a long period of preparation. Could
 we but have followed each individual player
 as he slowly and laboriously worked his way along
 the thorny path of lively and fervent labor
 in the hours and days of mere chudgery as
 he was becoming master of the instrument
 that he played, and observing the hours

of musical harmony, and sound, and
working his nature to them, we might
get some appreciation of the background of
preparation upon which the success of
the concert rested. Could we but have followed
the long slow process of working a hundred
individual flyers in to one great harmonious
orchestra, then we ~~should~~ would appreciate
the vast and thorough preparation which
made the way to success clear. But on the
night when you and I listened with soft atten-
tion to the soul stirring pulsations of the
most music, not then, but in those lovely
quiet hours of churning during the long
years of preparation, when the whole was
now being trained and being chilled

in the love of musical expression, so that by the freedom which comes from obedience to the laws of music, the men might put their whole souls into the final execution and render a perfect production before the great audience.

When shall Jesus win his victory over this great temptation of his life, when shall he learn to follow the command of truth, at the sacrifice of his own comfort and gain..?

Not at the time of that great dramatic moment of his life when he stands face to face with the stern realities of the moment, Not at the moment when he longs for the quiet and peace of his native Nazareth, and looks with hesitation into the new known future

with its unknown possibilities. Not then
 did he win, but in those quiet hours
 of his childhood, youth, and young
 manhood, when alone by himself, when
 mingling with the friends of his single
 life, when meeting the strangers who came
 within the circle of his relations, when in the
 simple, daily duties of life he learned to do
 the right, to follow the truth. In those days
 by the seafarer's bench, when he quietly went
 about his work, thinking about the great and
 eternal truths of life, and revolved in his
 mind the great problems of the human soul.
 In those hours when he walked with the
 God of nature in the hills and valleys of
 Palestine, and listened to the voice of

God speaking to him in the beauty and
 love of natural life. In those quiet
 moments in the dusk when the divine
 presence spoke within his own soul, and
 he gave himself up to contemplation of
 the greatness of man, that is when Jesus
 overcame the temptation of his life. Long before
 John the Baptist baptized him in the Jordan
 long before the dangers of a public ministry
 pressed upon, alone unwatched by the world
 the great man prepared himself to meet
 just such temptations, to be ready for just
 such moments of his life as we are considering
 to-day. The roots of victory rest deep in
 in the soil of careful, painstaking
 preparation. The triumph of Jesus on

the mountain is the result of a long & steady process of growth away the narrow floor & sides of the valley where he was growing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

To a certain extent we realize this truth. Nevertheless, the broken chain constitutions, the victims of too strong temptation, the failures in moments when we most need victory, the lack of spiritual power in the hour of great disappointment, and sorrow, the lack of that abandonment to the will of God in any great service, are not these evidences that tell us only too plainly that we have not learned this lesson

of preparation and growth, so essential to our lives, the ~~same~~ trust that would Jesus the one man who has been true to what was in him, and to what was in you and me.

Coleridge says in his *Lectures to Reflection*. "An unreflecting Christian walks in the ~~dark~~ twilight among swans, and fitfuls! He entreats the heavenly Father not to lead him into temptation, and yet places himself on the very edge of it, because he will not kindle the torch which his Father had given into his hands, as a means of prevention and lest he fury too late." How true that is? How little do we follow those laws of guidance which we apprehend

in a general way, but has not absorbed
 into our nature, and given ourselves over
 to their obedience. We seem sometimes like
 men lost in the forest without knowledge
 of the forest laws and its conditions, and are
 thus unable to find our way out, and for a
 moment, losing our trail we become con-
 fused, think we are lost and rush
 blindly and wildly about in this confusion
 and helplessness. All this confusion and
 helplessness is so needless for all about us
 are the very bits of knowledge that would
 lead the experienced woodsman to find
 his way out without danger. Should we
 but stop for a moment in this forest of
 life, and study the conditions about.

us, observe the direction from which the light comes now and then in the gloom, we would find right at our feet the very miracle that we need, the very signs that should direct us. Should we look more closely we will find the half hidden traces of a trail that some thoughtful soul of a bygone day has here traveled, and left behind these guides for those who come after. If we find ourselves in dire calamity, lost in the confusion of our life, in doubt because we cannot see far ahead, it avails us nothing to lose our self control, and rush wildly about trying that by mere chance we may come upon the truth. Let us sit down quietly and

to the careful observation of our condition. Let
 us look for the blessed trail of some former
 way farer, and thus gaining our bearings
 take up our journey again. May it not be
 that the fires that lead our forefathers through
 the darkness of the colonial days, were the fires
 that they received from their custom of
 daily scripture reading, and habitual turning
 away from the gloom, and seeking light
 in a moment of quiet contemplation. We
 are surrounded by an army of helpers if
 we will but turn to them for aid. The
 angels of high thoughts, and free hopes may
 minister unto us, as they did unto Jesus,
 and lead us into the unknown future.
 Our service together here each week is

designed to help us find our way. We read sentences that have been uttered by great men. The blaze of the trail they followed, we turn to the source of all truth, and all light for guidance, in their way. We exchange our own thoughts, our own observations our own ideas, that we may help one another in this long life of growth, and prepare to meet and overcome the temptations that way beset us.

But I cannot let this story of Jesus temptations pass, without pointing to its significance for us here in this church. We hold the key we believe that will unlock the door to the Kingdom of God on earth, we believe that we see the truth that this age

needs as Jesus saw the truth that his
 age needs. We are bound, then, as servants
 to spread the principles of freedom, and
 the brotherliness of man, bound by the sure
 command of God that lead Jesus triumphant
 on his mission, the command of God's truth
 speaking to our inner conscience. I feel
 hopeful that you would cheerily bear your
 the writing on the wall. We must commit
 ourselves to that same quiet, persistent
 preparation, growing day by day in wisdom and
 stature, and in favor with God and man.
 When the great test comes, and we are called
 upon to make our lives count for great
 truth in a moment of great temptation,
 then we will be victors, for cheerily

the victory will have been won in the
conquest over the small daily tasks which
hinder us in our growth. Temptation is
overcome by perforation. The roots of victory
rest deep in the soil of duty.