

First Sunday in Lent – March 5, 2017
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

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Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. 2) After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3) The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." 4) Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" 5) Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6) "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" 7) Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 8) Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9) "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." 10) Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" **11) Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.**

Dear Friends in Christ:

Have you noticed how some restaurants try to tempt you with their special deserts? Some have them displayed in a nice revolving display case near the entry or cash register. Others have a special platter all decked out with delicious looking samples which the waitress will bring over near the end of the meal. Maybe you've resisted the urge to indulge yourself by saying, "I'm tempted but I think I'll pass or maybe you've given in and ordered one of those great deserts.

Unless you're on a diet or have some other health concerns – there's probably nothing wrong with giving into the temptation to enjoy one of those deserts. But not all temptations are so harmless. Temptations come in many forms – but they always involve a test or a challenge requiring us to make a choice.

Temptations to sin come in many forms: 1) someone, something or some situation might try to lead us to sin. Perhaps a friend tries to get a young person to disobey their parents, or a certain situation might tempt someone to immoral behavior, or the easy availability of something which is unaffordable might pose a temptation to shoplift or steal. 2) Unpleasant experiences like pain, suffering, illness, disappointment, poverty, and grief might tempt us to question or challenge God's wisdom or love. 3) Success, good health, physical strength, good looks, intelligence or talent become temptations to trust in ourselves rather than the Lord.

Some temptations are rather obvious and somewhat easy for us to resist at times. Others are less than obvious and are almost impossible for us to resist. Sadly, all of us have failed in our efforts to resist sin. These failures go all the way back to Adam and Eve in the Garden when they listened to the Devil's cunning lies and disobeyed their loving creator as we heard in our OT lesson for today. Thankfully, the Lord promised a second Adam who would overcome the Devil for us. Our Gospel lesson reminds us that

Theme: Jesus Defeated the Devil in the Wilderness for Us

1. He saw through the devil's schemes
2. He resisted the devil's schemes

After Jesus' baptism, Matthew tells us Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. This account only records three temptations Christ identified and resisted but Luke tells us that "for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days..." **After fasting forty days and**

forty nights, he was hungry. 3) The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

The tempter – the diabolical one – the Father of lies – like the lies he told Adam and Eve in Eden approached Jesus in some way. He had sized up the situation – he realized that Jesus would have been hungry at this point. Why don't you take things into your own hands – if you're the Son of God make some bread out of these stones. That should be simple enough for you to do.

Satan is well aware that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior first promised to Adam and Eve. Jesus had come to crush Satan's head and to destroy his evil work but Satan wasn't going to surrender without a battle. With his appealing and cunning lies and tricks he attempted to keep Jesus from doing his Father's will. If he would succeed in just one instance, he would win the victory and evil would rule for all eternity.

With this temptation, the tempter was trying to get Jesus to take things into his hands. He poses as a friend, but he also poses a challenge. If you are the Son of God – in one instant he questions Jesus' divinity and in the next, he tells him to use his divine power for his own advantage. Jesus recognized the temptation as one that asked him to stop trusting in his Father's care – which had been providing for him for 40 days. It was the Father's will for Jesus to fast and Jesus intended to continue to follow his Father's will.

Jesus armed himself with the Sword of the Spirit – the Word of God to put the Tempter in his place: **4) Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"**

Jesus reply came from Deuteronomy 8:3. Through Moses God told the Israelites that the Lord had allowed them to grow hungry and then feed them with the miraculous manna to teach them that man doesn't live because of food but because of the word or promises God makes. God's word and promises to preserve and protect us is what enables us to go on living. That word and promise applied to the Israelites, it applied to Jesus, and it still applies today. By quoting this passage, Jesus demonstrated his complete trust in his Father to keep his body and life. Since the Father had lead him by the Spirit to fast in the wilderness there was no reason for Jesus to follow the tempters suggestion to use his divine power to avoid the hunger and suffering that was his Father's will at this time.

Before we move on to the next temptation, it's important for us to understand that these temptations were real for Jesus. His ability to recognize the temptations of Satan came from the Word of God. It's also important to point out that Jesus resisted them for us, using the same weapons available to us – the powerful and effective Word of God. It's also important for us to realize that the devil is not easily discouraged. He's persistent in his efforts to keep us from enjoying the blessings of eternal life.

5) Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6) "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Just how it was that the devil lead Jesus to the high point of the temple we don't know. Nor do we know for sure just where or how high this point was – historians speculate that it was a point overlooking a valley with a drop of some 450 feet.

Once again, Satan challenges Jesus divinity. If you're the Son of God – surely he'll protect you as well preserve you, won't he? Surely, he wouldn't let anything happen to you if you throw yourself over this cliff – why after all the Scriptures which are so important to you say that he'll send his angels to watch over you.

It seems as if Satan has gone from one extreme to the other. First, he tempted Jesus to take care of himself. Now he's tempting Jesus to demonstrate his trust in the Father by doing something careless and foolish. On the surface Satan seems to be saying that Jesus would be showing a lack of trust if he refused to jump from the highest point of the temple. Of course Satan has misquoted Scripture and has twisted God's promise. This is not a promise of unlimited angelic protection in all circumstances. It's an assurance of the Lord's protection as we go about our God-given responsibilities from day to day.

Martin Luther observed, "If the devil does not succeed in robbing us of our confidence in God, he will go to the other extreme and try to make us too daring." Once again Jesus recognized the temptation for what it really was. It was a temptation to put a false trust in God. Armed with the Word, Jesus stands firm in his resistance: **7) Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"**

There's a difference between trusting God and testing God. Trust is a proper response to clear promise of God. A test is demanding something God hasn't promised – rather than depending on what he has.

Perhaps an example will put things into perspective for us. God promises to supply our daily bread and all that we need for life. (Matthew 6:31-33) **So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32) For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33) But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

Well if that's true then why should we bother to work? Why don't we quit our day jobs and simply look for Christ's return? Do you recognize Satan's temptation there? God has never promised to miraculously provide us with food. To Adam he said: (Genesis 3:19) **By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground.** And to the Thessalonians who refused to work the Apostle Paul wrote: (2 Thessalonians 3:10) **For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."**

While God has in certain instances used miracles to provide for the needs of those who trusted in him (and while he still can) he has never promised to do this in every situation or even at our request. What he has promised is to lovingly take care of his creation by blessing the labor of their hands. And so we show our trust in the Lord as we go about our daily labor with contentment confident of his blessings.

Interestingly enough at times God challenges us to test him. For example through the prophet Malachi the Lord invites us: (Malachi 3:10) **Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.**

The Lord promises his blessings to those who express their gratitude to him with their generous offerings. When we confidently do as God says and boldly call upon him to keep his promises, that's not tempting God, it's trusting God.

It's important for us to keep this distinction in mind so that we don't end up following Satan's deceptions. Some times Christians needlessly expose themselves to danger excusing their actions by thinking, "When your time is up, it's up. God will keep me safe until then." That's tempting God. In such a way people may actually forfeit some of the days and years the Lord was willing to give. You see there's a difference between fatalism and the Christian faith. Fatalism is the attitude that since everything is pre-ordained for us, nothing we do will make a difference. On the other hand Christian faith trusts God to make everything work out for our good and blessing despite our failures and mistakes. It includes the responsibility of being conscientious caretakers of all the blessings the Lord has given us including the days and years he allots to us.

Because we often fail to see through the devil's schemes and resist them we can see just how important it was for Christ to do that successfully for us. After Satan's first two efforts failed, he tries to strike a bargain with Christ. **8) Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9) "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."**

Again, we don't know exactly how the devil accomplish all of this but his point is this. Jesus, you've come to save and rescue the nations from my control. I'll give them to you – and you won't have to suffer the agony of the cross – just bow down to me. Once again the Devil is posing alternatives to God's plans.

Satan often uses empty promises to tempt us to turn away from God's will. In spite of our better knowledge, he convinces us we'll be better off, wealthier, happier, more successful if we disobey God's commands and follow his suggestions. Look, he says, at all those who are ignoring God's will and they are getting along just swell. What he doesn't want us to think about of course is how they will fair in eternity. Satan's temptations offer much but in the end, they give nothing like what was promised – only sin, misery and death.

Once again, our Savior saw through the devil's temptation. He saw it as a short cut that lead to a dead end. Had he tried to do things in keeping with the devil's way; Jesus like Adam and Eve would have fallen under Satan's slavery to sin. There was one and only one way to rescue fallen mankind and that was the way of the cross – the way his Father planned for him.

The fact of the matter was that Jesus realized that **the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.** (Psalm 24:1) His promise to give Jesus all those kingdoms was a lie befitting the one who is **a liar and the father of all lies.** (John 8:44)

And once again, Jesus resists the devil's temptations with an appeal to the word of God using that word as the guide for his actions. **10) Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" 11) Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.**

Once again, the Lord Jesus demonstrated his faithfulness to his Father's will – he would not try to get around the Father's plan. **10) Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" 11) Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.**

Having to follow Jesus' command to go, the devil left him until an opportune time and the Father provided his beloved Son by sending his angels to attend him.

Although Satan has been defeated by Jesus, non-the-less he still seeks opportunities to trick and deceive us. When he does, we can follow our Savior's example of using the word to see through his tricks and to resist him. James 4:10 assures us: **Resist the devil and he will flee from you.**

With our Lord's help, we'll be able to see through the devil's schemes to create doubt and suspicions, to give misguided directions, to misapply Scripture, to shortcut God's will and to hold out empty promises. With his help we'll also be able to resist his schemes by continuing to trust in our heavenly Father, by not heeding the devil's directions, by interpreting Scripture with Scripture and by accepting God's will for himself.

As we've considered our text for today – we've seen how cunning Satan is and we've seen how our Savior overcame his temptations. Certainly, Jesus provides us with an example for resisting Satan that we are encouraged to follow but he did so much more than that. He defeated Satan for us – that's the main point of this lesson. By following his Father's plan, he set us free from his control and won eternal life for us. Trusting in his victory and rescue – may we look away from our own efforts and cling only to him. Amen.