

# FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

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## A Tried and True Savior

### Luke 4:1-13

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert,<sup>2</sup> where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.<sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'"<sup>5</sup> The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.<sup>6</sup> And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to."<sup>7</sup> So if you worship me, it will all be yours."<sup>8</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"<sup>9</sup> The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here."<sup>10</sup> For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully;<sup>11</sup> they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"<sup>12</sup> Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"<sup>13</sup> When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.*

Have you ever worked a job and had to start with a probationary period? It's a pretty common practice among employers to want to test their employees out for six months or a year before they hire them full time. This can be a stressful time for an employee. You don't want to make too many mistakes or upset the wrong person or you might not have your job anymore. In our gospel reading this morning, we see Jesus applying for the job of Savior of the world and facing a probationary period of forty days in the wilderness. As we look at Jesus' testing in the desert, we can be amazed at our tried and true Savior. We can also get some insight into how we face the trials and tests that come into our lives as followers of that Savior.

This event occurred at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. We read that after he was baptized, he was led by the Spirit in the desert. This is where he would prepare himself for the three long, difficult years of ministry that lay ahead of him. We learn that Jesus was in the desert for forty days. While he was there, he did not eat anything. You know how hungry you feel if you even miss one meal. It affects more than just your body. It affects your personality and your emotions as well. This forty day fast would leave Jesus physically and mentally vulnerable. What made things worse is that Jesus spent those forty days facing his ancient enemy, the devil. It doesn't seem as though the temptations we read about in our text are the only temptations Jesus faced during that time. The devil was constantly tempting and accusing him throughout that forty day period.

These were real temptations. You can see through the three temptations we read about in Luke that the devil knew what might have been the greatest temptations he could bring before Jesus. His first temptation seemed like something harmless. The devil told Jesus to turn a stone into bread and satisfy his hunger. Jesus certainly had the power to do so. But that was not the way in which his power was to be used. Jesus was not to use his almighty power to fill his stomach, but rather to do the will of God. In this case, God's will was for Jesus to be hungry and to show his complete

dependence on his Father and his Word for sustenance. The second temptation was also very sly. The devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and told him they could be his if only he bowed down to him. Of course, the devil had nothing to offer that Jesus would not be receiving from his Father. We know that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus. But the way in which he received that authority was different from the devil's temptation. Jesus had to endure the suffering and shame of the cross before he ascended to his position of power. Here, the devil was offering Jesus a shortcut—bypass all the pain and still receive the power—a very cunning lie. The third temptation tried to turn Jesus on his Father in heaven. The devil took Jesus to a high place in the temple and, in essence, said to Jesus, "If you trust your Father so much, throw yourself down. He will take care of you, won't he? Isn't that what he said in his Word?" Of course, this is another lie.

Just think of the combination of Jesus' physical and emotional state together with these crafty temptations of the devil. If he were merely a man, it would have been nearly impossible for him to resist the devil in that state. But thankfully, we know that he is also true God and, being God, he would never give in to sinful temptation.

That is what makes Jesus so different from you and me. We, too, face temptations every day. And just like with Jesus, the devil knows the best times and the ways to tempt us. He knows our personality. He knows the emotional state we are in. He knows when we are at our weakest. And that is when he attacks. Just think of how this happens in your life. Think of the weaknesses that you possess and how the devil exploits those weaknesses to lead you into sin—perhaps it is pride, or greed, or alcohol abuse or sexual sins. The list goes on and on. And when you are tired, worn out and emotionally drained, those temptations become all the more alluring.

So how are you going to fight off those temptations? If you rely on your own strength, your own willpower and your own reason to try and defeat the devil, you are going to lose time after time. It's so easy for the devil to make his temptations seem reasonable to us or emotionally satisfying. If we have nothing else to go on, temptation soon gives birth to sin. We've seen this cycle play out again and again. So how can we break the cycle? How can we resist the devil with his lies?

The key is realizing that the source of our strength cannot come from within. It comes from God. Jesus showed us that strength in the way he resisted the devil's temptations. How did Jesus answer every one of the devil's temptations? He replies, "*It is written.*" Jesus knew the Word of God perfectly. He knew how to apply it in every situation. That knowledge was put to good use in the wilderness. It didn't matter what his hungry body or his weary emotions were telling him, he knew what was written. And he let the Word defeat the devil. There was nothing the devil could do in response. He was thoroughly defeated each time. Even when he tried to twist God's Word and to use it against Jesus by quoting the passages about God's protection, Jesus knew the Word better than the devil and was able to use the correct passage in that situation, which was, "*Do not put the Lord your God to the test.*"

Of course, this was not Jesus' only encounter with the devil. The devil tried throughout Jesus' life to derail God's plan of salvation. And every time, Jesus triumphed, as only the Son of God could. Jesus' ultimate triumph over the devil came on the cross. There his words "It is written" were finally replaced with the cry, "It is finished!" Everything written in the Scriptures about the salvation of the

world had been accomplished. The sins of the world were atoned for. The one perfect man, Jesus Christ, had suffered for the sins of all. Jesus showed himself to be the world's Redeemer. The devil was helpless to stop him.

If we want to be successful in a war with the devil, this is where we need to begin. We need to look first to our Savior Jesus who did what we are unable to do on our own and defeated the devil in our place. We need to see that the triumph which Jesus won over the devil is our own triumph by faith in Jesus. The place where we see this is in the Word of God. That is where *it is written*. When we dig into God's Word and take its message to heart, we are able to counter the devil's lies with the simple phrase: "It is written." When the devil tries to accuse us and condemn. We can simply say, "It is written, *'There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.'*"

This does not mean that once we have a few Bible passages memorized, our struggle with the devil is over. Throughout our lives on this earth, we will always face trials and temptations. This is actually for our benefit. Luther wrote that "prayer, meditation, and temptation are what make a true theologian." It is when your faith is put to the test through temptations and trials that you have the opportunity for your head knowledge about your Savior Jesus to truly become heart knowledge. Temptation makes for a living and vital faith. It's not an easy process. There are times when we fall down along the way. But if we remain in the Word and rely on our Savior for our strength, our faith will be stronger for it.

We are in the season of the church year where the struggle with sin is shown very clearly. In fact, the forty days of lent are meant to remind us of the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness. But we do not spend our entire time during the season of lent looking into our own lives and seeing our sin. We also spend our time in lent looking at how well Jesus fought the battle against the devil. It begins this week in the wilderness. It will end in six weeks at the cross and the empty tomb. May God bless you in this Lenten season as you continue to wage war with devil and as you realize that together with Christ, you can and will triumph! **Amen.**

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