

# TEMPTED FOR YOU

Luke 4:1-13

First Sunday in Lent (Series C)

March 7, 2019

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for the First Sunday in Lent comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 4, verses 1 through 13. It is on page 727 of the pew Bible. In this gospel lesson, Jesus goes one on one with the devil. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Luke 4, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>1</sup> And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness <sup>2</sup>for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup>The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." <sup>4</sup>And Jesus answered him, "**It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'**" <sup>5</sup>And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, <sup>6</sup>and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. <sup>7</sup>If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." <sup>8</sup>And Jesus answered him, "**It is written,**

**" 'You shall worship the Lord your God,  
and him only shall you serve.' "**

<sup>9</sup>And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, <sup>10</sup>for it is written,

" 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,'

<sup>11</sup>and

" 'On their hands they will bear you up,  
lest you strike your foot against a stone.' "

<sup>12</sup>And Jesus answered him, "**It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'**"

<sup>13</sup>And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Jesus is a good example for us. We face temptations, and we often give into them. But Jesus withstood temptation, and he made it look easy. We would do well to look to this passage as an example of how to resist the devil's temptations.

I'm going to go out on a limb here and assume that you all can think of some instance, probably in the fairly recent past, where you gave into temptation. And I don't mean some morally neutral temptation like cheating on your diet. I mean a truly morally evil temptation, where you knew that a certain thought, word, or deed was evil, but you gave into the temptation anyway. If you can't think of a recent example, you might be suffering from memory loss. Or it could mean that you have a weak conscience. Perhaps it is not doing a very good job of warning

you when temptation arises. Or it could mean that you just don't know God's Word very well. Perhaps there are several evil temptations you have given into without even knowing they are evil. Maybe you just don't know God's Word well enough to know what is or is not sin.

If you can't think of anything, take Martin Luther's advice: "Consider yourself in light of the Ten Commandments" (*Small Catechism*, "Confession"). You can find them on page 23 of the hymnal, or on page 95 with the Small Catechism's explanations, or in Exodus 20, or in Deuteronomy 5.

Have you chased after other gods, knowing that money, power, fame, success, career, or whatever else your heart desires should not be your god? Have you misused the Name of God? Remember that neglect of his Name is also a misuse. Have you neglected his Word or the gathering of the saints for worship? Have you been tempted to prioritize other things over God's Word? And have you given into that temptation? Have you disrespected or dishonored your parents or other superiors? Have you wished or caused bodily harm on another person? Have you committed adultery, either with your body, eyes, or mind? Have you taken what is not yours, either blatantly or under some pretense of a legal right? Have you spoken deceptively, whether an outright lie or something that was "technically" true? Has your heart desired anything that is not rightly yours? And have you allowed your heart to persist in its coveting?

I'm going to go out on a limb and assume that one or more of the Ten Commandments reminds you of something in the fairly recent past where you entertained temptation and gave into it. And I think this is actually a very sturdy limb, because if you can't think of anything, you are either a perfect human, or you have a much bigger problem than you think.

We have an obvious problem with sin, which means we also have a problem with temptation, because sin doesn't just happen. If we could learn to manage temptation, our problem with sin would fade away. So Jesus stands as an example of overcoming temptation.

We are really quite weak in the face of temptation. When it comes to temptation, the question isn't really about whether or not we will give into temptation, but merely how long it will take for us to give in. So if there is an instance where you don't give into temptation, it's probably just because you weren't faced with the temptation long enough. The longer a temptation sits in front of us, the weaker our resolve becomes. And the more we think about the temptation, the more likely it becomes that our sinful hearts will rationalize it. Whenever we think about a certain temptation, what we're really doing is trying to come up with some kind of justification for committing the sin. If we let temptation linger, sooner or later, we will give in. Whenever we do actually overcome temptation, it's either because we removed the temptation on our own, or, more likely, because God removed it for us.

In this respect, Jesus is a good example for us. He did not allow temptation to linger. He did not entertain the devil's suggestions. He did not take time to consider them. His responses were swift and firm. Now, he was never going to give into them anyway, no matter how long they dangled in front of him, but even so, there's no point in letting it hang there.

Part of the reason Jesus was able to dispense with them so quickly was because he knew God's Word. Jesus knew the Scriptures, so he had ready responses for each temptation. And in this way, Jesus provides the best example for us. Even Jesus, the Son of God in human flesh, used the Word of God to combat temptation.

Our greatest defense against temptation is the Word of God. Psalm 119:(11) says,

"I have stored up your word in my heart,  
that I might not sin against you."

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Storing up God's Word in our hearts means more than just reading it once for information. It means meditating on it. It means seeking life and wisdom from the Word of God. "Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:3).

So Jesus gives us an example for overcoming temptation. Let the Word of God train your conscience and strengthen your heart. And when temptation comes, don't let it linger, and don't entertain it. Dismiss it with the Word of God. Jesus is our example.

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I've heard several sermons on this passage that basically went along the lines of what I just said. They were really bad sermons, and it probably would have been better if they hadn't been preached at all. If this sermon were to stop here, it would also be a bad sermon, and I would hope that someone would chastise me for it. That's not because anything I just said is untrue. It is true. Jesus is our example. But he must not be only an example. If Jesus is only our example, we are still in our sins and will burn in hell for eternity. I would like to avoid this. So it is a dangerous, even fatal, error to preach Christ as only an example. However, it would also be an error—albeit less fatal—to ignore the example Jesus sets for us. So we keep him as an example, but we also look to him for something more.

We look to him as our righteousness. We look to him as the one who resists temptation on our behalf and bestows it to us as a gift. By his death at Calvary, he takes away our sin. But our redemption is not merely about what he takes away. It is also about what he gives to us in place of our sin. He gives to us his very own perfect righteousness. His perfect obedience, from conception to death, is credited to us. The love he showed to his neighbors is credited to us. His steadfastness in the face of temptation is credited to us. Where we have failed, along with all of humanity, that guilt is laid on Jesus, and his innocence is given to us. Science teaches that nature abhors a vacuum. Apparently God does too, because he is not content to simply remove our sin, but he gives us Jesus' righteousness to take its place. Jesus was tempted in our place. He succeeded where we fail, and he gives this obedience to us as a gift.

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There are two Old Testament connections that demonstrate this.

The more obvious connection is to Israel's Exodus from Egypt and their wilderness wandering. If you've been participating in the Bible in a year reading plan, this will be fresh in your mind. By the way, it's still not too late to start. You can either binge read to catch up, or you can just pick up where we are now.

Anyway, there are several connections to the Exodus from Egypt and the wilderness wandering. First, just before the temptation in the wilderness, there is Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, where God speaks from heaven and declares Jesus to be his beloved Son (3:22). This parallels the crossing of the Red Sea, which the prophet Hosea identifies as the action by which God adopted Israel as his son (Hos. 11:2), although they were rebellious. The genealogy of Jesus splits the text in Luke, but, chronologically, the temptation immediately follows his baptism.

Then Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit in the wilderness. This parallels the pillar of cloud and fire in Exodus, through which God led the Israelites.

Then there is the number forty. Jesus fasted and was tempted in the wilderness for forty days. This parallels the forty years Israel spent in the wilderness.

Then there are the three temptations, all of which recall incidents where Israel failed, but Jesus succeeds. The people of Israel grumbled against God and despaired of him when they had

no bread (Ex. 16:2-3, 7). But Jesus refused to turn a stone into bread. The people of Israel rebelled and worshipped false gods, most notably a golden calf (Ex. 32). But Jesus refused to worship Satan. The people of Israel tested the LORD when they had no water (Ex. 17:1-7). But Jesus refused to test God. In each temptation, he stands firm and excels where Israel had failed.

All of this indicates that he has come to stand in the place of Israel and fulfill all righteousness on their behalf. But this is not only for Israel's benefit; it is for the whole world. Israel was to be a light for the nations. They failed, because they were sinful like you and me. But Jesus triumphed in their place and for us. His righteous obedience is credited to us.

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The other Old Testament connection affirms that Jesus did this, not only for Israel, but for the whole human race. His temptation recalls the fall of Adam, who is the father of all humanity.

The first indication of this is the genealogy (3:23-38). It's kind of a strange place for a genealogy. But Luke sticks it right between Jesus' baptism and temptation. And he runs it backward. Instead of starting at the beginning, he starts with Jesus and goes backward in time so that it ends with, "the son of Adam, the son of God" (3:38). Luke wants us to remember that Jesus is tempted as both the son of Adam and the Son of God. He goes in the place of all humanity.

The devil's tactics recall the temptation in the garden. He starts with food again. He wants man to look to him for life instead of God, but the devil only has death to offer.

And he questions God's Word. To Eve the serpent said, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1). This, by the way, was a misquotation of God's command. And with Jesus he also questions God's Word, both with the first and last temptations, when he says, "If you are the Son of God" (4:3, 9). At Jesus' baptism, God the Father spoke from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (3:22). The devil questions that Word of God and tempts Jesus to prove it.

But when questioning God's Word doesn't work, the devil outright lies. To Eve he said, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4-5). Now he flatly contradicts God's Word. He outright lies to Jesus as well when he says, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." (4:6-7). The devil never possessed the kingdoms of the world. He wanted them, but God never handed them over. "The kings of the earth set themselves ... against the LORD and against his anointed. ... He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision." (Ps. 2:2, 4). At his trial, Jesus says to Pilate, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11). Authority was never handed over to Satan; he just likes to pretend it was.

But Jesus doesn't argue with the devil. He doesn't dispute the point. Unlike Eve in the Garden of Eden, Jesus doesn't engage. He simply invokes the Word of God, and the temptation is over. This is a sign of strength. He doesn't flinch. He's not there to persuade the devil of anything. He's there to resist. The devil already knows Jesus is the Son of God. He already knows Jesus possesses all authority. And Jesus knows the devil knows this. So Jesus doesn't have to prove anything to the devil. It's kind of like how you deal with a bully. A bully just wants to rattle you. So sometimes a person who is weak or insecure engages a bully. That was me when I was in school, and the bullies loved it. But the strong person—if any of us actually are—the strong person doesn't engage. The strong person isn't bothered. So Jesus doesn't engage. He doesn't take the bait.

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The reason for this temptation is that the devil wants Jesus to bypass the cross. Jesus is on a path to the cross to redeem us, to purchase us back. But it's not like we belong to the devil, so the devil can't give us to Jesus. We are in slavery to sin. We are not under the authority of Satan. We are under the wrath of God. So Jesus goes to the cross to redeem us out of slavery to sin.

The devil would like to blur this distinction and make Jesus think that he can just hand us over to him. It's a temptation to bypass the suffering of the cross. But if Jesus were to worship the devil, he would not actually gain a kingdom, but would himself become a slave to sin. This is really the devil's attempt to gain the kingdom he never had. But Jesus knows this, so he doesn't flinch.

Finally, the devil tells Jesus to throw himself off the temple. This would be a great way for Jesus to prove to the devil that he really is the Son of God, but Jesus doesn't need to prove himself. They both know who Jesus is. So Jesus dismisses him with one final word: "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" (4:12). Not only is this the reason Jesus won't give in to the temptation, it is also a rebuke of the devil, for this is what the devil had been doing to Jesus all along. He was testing God.

He was testing his God. The devil is not the free agent he wants to be. He still has a God, though he will never receive mercy from this God as we do. The devil is no free agent. He may be a devil, but he is God's devil, and he can do nothing that God does not allow.

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The devil may wreak havoc, but God has set a limit to his evil. The devil may tempt us, but no more than God allows. We may even give into his temptations, for we are weak, but our Jesus is strong, and he is jealous for us. He will not allow the devil to take what is rightly his. He withstood temptation for our sake. He held to the path of suffering for our sake. He bore our sin. He endured the cross. And he gives to us his perfect righteousness. So trust not in your own righteousness. Do not trust your own ability to overcome temptation. Trust in Christ's righteousness. When you are in the midst of temptation, seek help from him. When you give into temptation, and sometimes you will, flee to Christ, for he is your fortress and salvation. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.