

March 9, 2025, Sermon

“We Want it Now!”

Luke 4:1-13

Imagine, for a moment, that the devil has decided to turn his attention to you – to test you, tempt you, try to stop you from following Jesus. You are a threat to the devil, after all. You are a follower of Jesus. You are here, worshiping our Lord. The devil doesn't like that. So, imagine that he has decided to try to turn you from your faith. And he's going to approach you in three different ways, each way an attempt to try and turn you away from God. Three ways that the devil thinks might work, might tempt you to wander off the narrow way. What might those be for you? They're a little different for each of us. So, what might yours be? Thinking about that, and sincerely wrestling with that, is an important aspect of our Lenten journey.

In today's gospel reading, we find the devil doing this very thing with Jesus. Testing Jesus, tempting him, trying to stop him during his forty days in the wilderness. And what is so helpful about this reading for us is that we get to learn from Jesus *how* to deal with the temptations that the devil confronts us with. We are not the Son of God! But still, we can learn from Jesus how to overcome whatever temptations we might face. In a world where we want everything now, we can learn from Jesus what we can do to face our temptations.

Take the first temptation that Jesus faces. It's a pretty basic and universal one: It is about food. We've all had temptations involving food, I suspect. But imagine going without food for forty days, as Jesus did. At the end of those forty days, the devil approached Jesus and said to him, *“If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”* That must have been quite a temptation for Jesus. But what is this temptation, really? Is it just to eat food? Or is it about more than that?

If you are the Son of God, the devil is saying, then use your divine power to turn a stone into bread. This is a temptation to use his divine power for himself. It is a temptation to do something for himself. Not for his heavenly Father. Not for humanity. But for himself. And I suspect that the devil knows that if he can get Jesus to think

about himself, even just a little, then the devil has won. Because there is no way that Jesus will be crucified for our sins, if he begins thinking about himself in any way. He must trust God first!

For example, in the book of Exodus, when the people of God had just begun their time in the wilderness, God has announced his provision for the people. One morning, the people find something on the ground, but they aren't sure what it is. Moses informs them that it is bread God is giving them (v. 15). He then provides very specific instructions about gathering it for their own consumption. They follow his instructions and gather the bread (vv. 16–19).

But then they fail to follow his instructions about trying to stockpile it. God wanted them to trust him day by day, but the people wanted to build up a pantry of food for the tough trip ahead. They were more concerned about the present, and they wanted it now! When some didn't follow instructions but instead saved part of it for the morning, "it bred maggots and smelled." Their inability to practice self-control and do as they were told and trust in God resulted in rot and destruction.

We do that don't we? We think more about our present situation, and blame God for our circumstances, rather than praising God, and trusting that He will take care of us. So, when we are tempted in this way, how can we deal with it? What does Jesus do? He answers with Scripture. He quotes Deuteronomy (Deu 8:3) to the devil: "*It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'*" And the devil would know the next part of that verse: "*But by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*"

We don't live by bread alone. We don't live *for* bread alone. Our lives are about much more than eating and drinking and working and sleeping. They are about the relationship with God that Jesus came to restore. What seems to be rotting in our lives, that we need to throw out?

How about the second temptation? The devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and 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.*" Now, think first about why this might have been tempting to Jesus. The

temptation isn't to worship the devil, of course. The temptation for Jesus is to take a *shortcut* to his goal – to agree to worship the devil so that he could be given control of the world. And wouldn't the world be a better place if Jesus were in control? Of course, Jesus *is* in charge, but he chooses to rule the world not by force, but by love. And that means that his will is not always done among us.

It's a matter of trust, isn't it? Even for Jesus. Of trusting God with our little corner of the world. Worshiping God, serving God, remembering that God is in control, not us. We can talk to God about it, and we should. We can join God in improving our corner of the world, and we should. But it really is God's world, even our corner of it. And our task is to worship, serve, trust, and love. And leave the rest to God.

So, how about the third temptation? The devil took Jesus to Jerusalem and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple; and this time, the devil tried using Scripture on Jesus. The devil knows his Bible! So, he quoted Psalm 91 to Jesus: *"Throw yourself down from there, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"*

So, why would this be tempting for Jesus? Why would it be tempting for him to throw himself down from the temple, and trust God's angels to protect him from getting hurt? Well, imagine how much easier it would have been for Jesus to teach and preach, to gather disciples and to build the church, to do everything that Jesus was doing in his years of public ministry, if he started with a splashy miracle like this one. Everyone would have believed in him right away. The Pharisees, scribes, tax collectors, fishermen. Everyone would have known, right away, that this man truly is the Son of God. And Jesus could have done a lot of good if everyone believed that right away.

In fact, wouldn't it be great if Jesus did that today? Did something so amazing in our world that everyone alive believed in him? I think it is easy to see why this would be tempting. But, again, we don't have this temptation in our life, do we? Not literally, of course. But aren't there times when we are tempted to let the *ends* justify the *means*? Aren't there times when we can see a *shortcut* to accomplishing something good, and it seems like it might be worth it in the end, even if it's not the best way to accomplish it?

Jesus is reminding us of today is that sometimes, it is better to do something in the right way, and fail, than to do something in the wrong way, and succeed. Success is not everything. Or, as Mother Teresa famously put it: *“God has not called me to be successful, but to be faithful.”* We are called to be faithful, and to trust the results to God. Jesus didn’t start his ministry with a splashy miracle because he knew that it was not God’s will. It would have been a shortcut, and it would have worked – and he would have been successful, but he chose being faithful over being successful. And he invites us to do the same.

We will always be tempted to live for ourselves, to take control of our corner of the world, and to focus on success rather than faithfulness. But Jesus teaches us that through prayer and Scripture, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can live for others, we can trust God with our corner of the world, and we can be faithful.

In a world where we want everything now, let us remember what Jesus’ self-control behavior did for us. He didn’t turn the stone into bread, and he didn’t come down from the cross. And because he didn’t, he defeated the devil, once and for all. We don’t have to fear the devil anymore. Because Jesus has defeated him for us, which means that no matter what is happening in our lives, no matter the temptations and trials and tests we might be going through, we can turn to Jesus, and he will be there for us, to lead us and guide us all along the way. Thanks be to God. Amen