

## “So . . . What’s So Wrong with These Temptations?”

Luke 4:1-13

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

February 14, 2016 – First Sunday in Lent



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. I’m sure you’ve heard the old saying that timing is everything. Something that might be perfectly acceptable in one setting might be totally out of place in another. It all depends on what’s being done – and when. For example, suppose you wanted to play a game of Scrabble. There’s nothing wrong with that. It’s a perfectly acceptable activity, and it’s lots of fun. But suppose you wanted to play Scrabble on Sunday morning at 9:00. That’s a problem, because at 9:00 Sunday morning something vastly more important is going on, Church – whose importance far outranks the necessity of playing a game – any game. So, I think you can see that oftentimes timing is everything.

It strikes me that the same is true in this morning’s Gospel text which recounts the temptation of our Lord by the devil. Think about what’s going on out there in the wilderness. Is it what the devil is tempting Jesus to do, or is it rather all about the timing? Now remember, immediately before this Jesus had been Baptized by John in the Jordan. Jesus’ Baptism was when the Holy Spirit descended on Him and the Father’s voice thundered: “You are my beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.” There in the Jordan Jesus was being made ready to begin His public ministry – but not quite yet. First He would have to be led by the Spirit out into the wilderness for forty days to be tempted by the devil.

Our first parents, Adam and Eve had been tempted by the devil in the Garden and had failed miserably. Through their disobedience all mankind fell into sin so that the sinful nature of the first Adam has now been passed down to every generation since – and so death fell upon all mankind like a shroud. Is it possible that Jesus, the second Adam, would succeed where every one of us have failed? If death and the devil are to be defeated, Jesus had to overcome the temptations you and I daily give in to. Here was all Israel reduced to One in the person of the Messiah. Would He prevail against the devil where all before had failed miserably? If there was to be a new people of God, Jesus would have to lead the way. Hence Jesus would have to go out into the wilderness to meet the devil’s temptations head on.

But notice how the devil tempted Jesus. Were the things he tempted Him with really all that bad, or was it rather a question of timing? Remember, Jesus hadn’t

eaten anything for forty days, so quite naturally He was hungry. That was when the devil came to Him, saying: “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” Think about it. Would there be anything inherently wrong with Jesus turning a stone into bread? Jesus *is* the Son of God! He had been there in the beginning with the Father. He had been active in the creation of the heavens and the earth. He is the One “by whom all things were made,” including all the stones out there in the wilderness – as well as every grain of wheat in every field. Should it have been problem had He done only what was rightly His to do as God in human flesh?

Didn’t Jesus deserve a bite to eat after not eating anything for forty days? Where would the harm be? Who possibly could be more entitled to have not just a loaf of bread but an entire feast in His honor? As the obedient Son of God, Jesus was certainly worthy of feasting not fasting. Why begrudge Him a morsel of bread after forty days of fasting? “Go ahead, Jesus,” the devil said, “if you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” But Jesus had more important things to do other than filling His belly. So Jesus answered the devil: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” The bread would have to wait for another time. Jesus was on a mission from the Father. Here, at the beginning of His ministry Jesus would have to deny His own natural human desires so that He could carry out the will of the Father. That’s what He would have to do throughout His earthly ministry – especially at its bloody conclusion on Calvary when He would say: “Not My will but thine be done.” This fast would be good preparation for that day, and so Jesus turned away this first temptation.

Next “the devil took Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, 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. If You, then, will worship me, it will all be Yours.’” Let’s set aside for a moment whether or not the devil really had been given all that glory and power to distribute to whomever he wished. At the outset we know that worshipping the devil would be absolutely wrong. But the idea that Jesus would be given “all the kingdoms of this world . . . all this authority and their glory” – what’s wrong with that? Is Jesus not entitled to it anyway? He *is* the very Son of God. Who better to

receive all that glory? Did the angel Gabriel not tell Mary that Jesus would be great and be called the Son of the Most High – that the Lord God would give Him the throne of His father David – that He would reign over the house of Jacob forever – and that of His kingdom there would be no end? Later on wouldn't Jesus Himself say that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Him? If that's true, and it is, then what's wrong with Jesus claiming what was rightly His? "Go ahead, Jesus, take what's rightfully Yours!" said the devil. "All the kingdoms of the world and their glory can be Yours now for the taking, if only You listen to me."

But this was not the time. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world – not as the world reckons power and glory. And Jesus' kingdom, authority and glory would not be won by taking shortcuts, much less by worshiping the devil. His kingdom would involve a crown of thorns and a sign that identified Him rightly as "The King of the Jews." And so Jesus answered the devil, saying: "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.'" And with this Word of God the second temptation was overcome.

Now came the third temptation. The devil took Jesus to Jerusalem, to the pinnacle of the Temple, the highest point of the Temple. And there the devil said to Him: "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning You, to guard You,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Now it's not that the devil was denying that Jesus is the Son of God. It was more like he was saying: "Since You are the Son of God, then how about doing something to prove it!" Who better than you, Jesus, deserves the protection of God and His guardian angels? Surely God wouldn't let You, his beloved Son, see any harm! Go ahead, Jesus, take that leap of faith. Take God up on His promises! If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here."

But that line would not work either. So He replied: "It is written: 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" And in fact, the devil's line would not work later, either. Peter would also confess that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. But when Jesus started talking about going to Jerusalem to suffer and be killed, Peter objected, and Jesus had to rebuke him, saying: "Get behind Me, Satan!" And when Jesus finally went to Jerusalem, suffered at the hands of His enemies and was put to death, the mockers would say – in words echoing the devil's temptation out there in the wilderness: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the

cross" –another of the devil's temptations to take the easy way out which He resisted.

You see, it is all about timing. There would come a day when the Father would publicly vindicate His Son by raising Him from the dead. There would come a day when Jesus would receive an everlasting kingdom, authority and glory. There would come a time for joyous feasting at the great heavenly banquet. But that time was not yet, not at the time of the devil's temptation. Jesus first had a job to do. And He would stick to the task. There would be no shortcuts, no easy way out, no using of His divine power to serve Himself. No, the Son of Man had come not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. That's what Jesus is about. That was the journey to Jerusalem and the way of the cross, that Jesus was setting out on here at the beginning of His public ministry. Nothing would be able to stop Him from doing what the Father had sent Him to do. He would not be deterred by anything, least of all the devil.

And that's very Good News for you, dear Christian. You have a Savior who has withstood and overcome all the temptations of the devil – One who has defeated the devil for you. Whereas you and I have been weak and have yielded to temptation and sinned many times – falling for the old lie that we deserve what we want and that we ought to have it now – Jesus is strong. He has stayed the course. We have a Savior, Jesus, who is completely faithful, utterly reliable, strong to save, and totally committed to our eternal salvation. That's why He deferred the bread, the glory and the protection. He would not be deterred from going to the cross for you.

For Jesus, glory would be coming, but first there had to be suffering. To be sure, the glory would come through the suffering. Jesus' suffering and dying for the sins of the world, for your sins and mine – was His greatest glory, the glory that would come through His cross. "Was it not necessary," Jesus would ask later, "that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?" The answer, of course, is "Yes, it was necessary." And Jesus knew this. From the temptation of the devil out there in the wilderness all the way to the bloody cross and His death in Jerusalem, Jesus knew what His mission was. Timing, then, is everything. In the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus knew what time it was: It was time to defer the glory, so that He could go to the cross to save us all. And save us all He did. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.