

Pastor T.C. Arnold
1st Sunday in Lent
Matthew 4:1-11
February 26th, 2012

He passed the test! And it's a good thing to because the salvation of the world depended on it. As if there was ever any doubt. Jesus is man but also God, completely and totally. He would pass the test and the devil isn't bright enough to realize that he was fighting a battle he simply couldn't win.

This wilderness experience in the Gospel text for today was our Savior's first Gethsemane. You remember that garden to which Jesus and the disciples would retreat after the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday. We begin this season of Lent with temptation in a desert. Jesus is alone with no one to talk to but the Heavenly Father...and then, of course, Satan. Even though Jesus was just a stone's throw away from His disciples at Gethsemane, this wilderness/desert garden was a lonely place of temptation, fasting and praying.

Yes, this too is a garden. This garden is desolate and bare. Instead of being dark and cold like Gethsemane, this garden is sunny and hot. Instead of staying a few brief hours before journeying to Calvary, this wilderness would be home for our Savior for 40 days. Instead of meeting the temple guard who would take Jesus to stand before the Sanhedrin, in the wilderness Jesus would meet the prince of death himself. Instead of being willingly carried off to be beaten and crucified at the end of it all, in this garden Jesus begins ministry by going forth to call unto Himself fisherman-disciples. Jesus had a plan from the first garden to the second. Jesus was going to do things His way – He was going to do it for you.

Notice in the Gospel text for today these three temptations the Lord endured for you. They tell us a lot about our Lord. They tell us how Jesus would carry out His ministry. They give us a picture of what He would and would not do during this ministry. We sometimes wonder "why" Jesus did what He did. Why didn't He do more amazing things to prove that He was the Son of God? Why didn't He just wave His magic wand and forgive all people everywhere and not have to die on that wretched tree? This chapter from St. Matthew's Gospel is a commentary on how Jesus was going to carry out His ministry.

Hear again the words of the Lord's first temptation. Satan says, "*If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.*" He knew Jesus was hungry. He knew that the first weakness of a weak and hungry man is going to be his stomach. "Eat something," says the tempter. "Eat something and be satisfied. And while you are at it, prove to me who you are. Prove to me that you can indeed do it." Now comes the response of Jesus – and this is the first clue we have regarding how Jesus is going to carry forth His ministry. He says, "*Man does not live by bread alone.*" In other words, Jesus was not going to use His Divine power to prove He is who He says He is.

Yes, Jesus could have moved a mountain to prove He could do it. Yes, Jesus could have turned the sky black and have it rain manna like God did in the book of Exodus. But He didn't. His Words would stand alone. You remember the parable of the rich young man and Lazarus? The rich young man who died wanted Abraham to send Lazarus from the dead to warn his family of what would become of them if they did not believe. Abraham said, "*They have the law and the prophets to tell them.*" Sending someone from the dead will not convince them more than the words of the faithful. This first temptation is indicative of the ministry of Jesus. There will be times when Jesus' divine nature will be suppressed by His human nature.

And then there is the second temptation. "*The devil took Jesus to the holy city and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, 'if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down...'*" The Word of God says the angels will protect you. Jesus responded by showing Satan that if you are going to use the Word of God, you better abide by the Word of God. He says, "*It is written, you shall not put the Lord you God to the test*" (this comes from Exodus 17).

Yes, (again) Jesus could have moved a mountain to prove He could do it. Yes, Jesus could have turned the sky black and have it rain manna like God did in the book of Exodus. And in this occasion, call on the angels from heaven to protect Him. Could He have done that while He was standing in that second garden? Could He have been protected from Judas' betrayal and strikes to the face from those members of the Sanhedrin? What about from Pilate or from the Roman soldiers who beat Him constantly? What about from the nails that would go through His hands? Yes, He could. But He wouldn't. And He wouldn't have (and didn't) call on the protection of the angels in the wilderness either.

Lastly, Satan tempts Jesus with something that doesn't belong to him. He showed Jesus all of the kingdoms of the world and told Him that they would be His if He just would fall down to worship the devil. "You go, Satan," says Jesus. It's an imperative. We don't want to say it because we always use it out of context. But if we did use it in this context there is nothing wrong with what Jesus said. He said, "Satan, go to hell." That is where He belongs and that is where Jesus told him to go.

In the ministry of Jesus there are no compromises with evil and no deals with the devil. These three things tell us about the ministry of Jesus – all wrapped up in forty days and nights of fasting and praying. We see this clearly in the New Testament Gospels. We see this clearly in our lives today.

For example, Jesus is in charge of every situation in our lives – not us. When we call on the Lord, we call His will be done (like Jesus did in Gethsemane). He's in charge – and at times we like to impose our will on God. Our prideful selves think we know our world, our circumstance and our lives better. It's just not true.

Secondly, Our Lord Jesus is going to do what His Word says He will do, just like when He told the devil what was written in the Word. When God's Word has us do something, we are to do it. When it has us not to do something, we don't do it. God sticks to His Word, and so should we. God expects this from His faithful children. He told the devil to do it and He tells you to do it and He Himself does it. Do not deviate from the Word.

Lastly, God does not compromise on the truth for our lives. "You go, Satan!" There will be no deal made with you. We would never think to make such deals with the devil. We even joke about it as if something good or "out of the ordinary" happens to us. But that is exactly what we do when we plot or scheme or try to gain in dishonest ways – or even to cover up that which will make others disappointed in our actions.

Our Lord's temptation in the wilderness is a picture of how He would carry out His earthly ministry. It's also an indication of how our Jesus will remain faithful to us no matter what. We see but a glimpse of our Savior's up-coming agony during Holy Week. We see but a glimpse of that second garden – the place He will pray, sweat blood and lay eyes on His betrayer. The place where Jesus is preparing to go – the place He knew He needed to go all along... for you.

He passed the test in the wilderness. There was never any doubt. Thank God He did. We couldn't do it. He did it for us. Now the cross is starting to come into focus. Now the place our Savior has to be is in view. From the Jordan River, to the wilderness – to the many other places Jesus and His disciples will be – to the upper room and then the garden. And then, yes, to Calvary's holy mount... our Jesus is on His way. For all of our sakes... thank God. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.