**Luke 4:1-13** February 14, 2016

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Lent 1

*Luke 4:1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, 2 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.*

*3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”*

*4 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone.’’”*

*5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 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. 7 So if you worship me, it will all be yours.”*

*8 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’’”*

*9 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. 10 For it is written:*

*“ ‘He will command his angels concerning you*

*to guard you carefully;*

*11 they will lift you up in their hands,*

*so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’’”*

*12 Jesus answered, “It says: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’’”*

*13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

***“If You Are the Son of God…”***

“I’ll bet you’re not man enough to fight.” You hear it in the dusty Western movies, maybe with a shot of whiskey thrown in the face. And with those words fists fly, chairs get busted, and the entire liquor cabinet (and mirror—can’t forget the mirror) is broken to shards. Apparently, in the Wild West, the only way a man could prove he was a man was by brawling. I’m not sure it was true, but in the movie industry it made money.

In another hot and dusty part of the world, the devil said the same thing, “If you really are the Son of God, you would…” The Devil knew who Jesus was. Just before this Jesus had been baptized down at the Jordan River. When he was baptized, a voice from heaven—the voice of God the Father—said, *“You are my Son.”* (3:22). Remember that.

Then Jesus went out into the desert. Our reading tells us that he ***“was led by the Spirit in the desert.”*** He was led by the Holy Spirit to battle the Devil. Jesus went on the offense and engaged our enemies, sin and Satan. This was no five minute fist fight. It was a six-week battle of mind and will.

In our reading, we hear about three temptations. Now it also says that the Devil was tempting Jesus for 40 days. We should not think these three temptations were the only temptations. Over 40 days, Jesus was tormented by the Devil’s many temptations. Perhaps these were a representative sampling. Perhaps these were the three worst. We can only guess. But these three reveal quite a bit to us about the Devil, and at least as much about Jesus.

**I. Are You Really the Son of God?**

**A.** To me, the first temptation seems the most difficult. I realize I can’t speak for you, this is a personal opinion, but to me the first temptation is the strongest. ***“[Jesus] ate nothing [for forty days], and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread’”*** (2-3). Everything about this temptation is reasonable. Look at Jesus. He is emaciated, starving, hungry. Jesus is hungrier than any of us has ever been in our entire lives. And since when is eating a sin? Do we need to repent every time we grab a loaf of bread off the shelf at Wal-Mart? And even if Jesus was supposed to fast, wasn’t 40 days enough? I mean, how much longer can one survive? Surely he could have a bit. This wasn’t an all-you-can-eat buffet, we are just talking about a loaf of bread to keep body and soul together. As the Son of God, it is certainly within his authority. And if you want to get really pragmatic, think about this: how can he fulfill God’s will if he starves to death out in the desert? Isn’t it better to get a little something and survive and serve God? I can see a thousand rationalizations and reasons that Jesus should have been able to do just what was put in front of him: To use his divine power to make a couple pieces of bread.

Yet the devil’s temptation is a real temptation to sin—not so much because of making bread, but because it is a temptation to not trust God. If Jesus were to take the power of providing for himself into his own hands, he would not have been trusting God. Jesus’ entire life was lived in consistency to this rule. He healed thousands, he fed crowds. But when it came to Jesus’ own life, it was a life of prayer, a life of going to his heavenly Father for all that he needed. Never did Jesus use his divine power as the Son of God for himself.

The solution to Jesus’ problem was so close he could taste it.

There is an old country remedy for a dog that likes to eat chickens. (Now mind you I have not done it nor do I advocate it. I’m just saying…) You take that dog, put a piece of chicken meat in its mouth and tie its mouth shut for two days. Supposedly a dog can’t swallow with its mouth shut. So there the meat sits for two days – and that dog will never again chase a chicken again. In a different way, that’s what this was like for Jesus. He had the solution to his hunger that close to him, but he couldn’t use it. How it must have tortured him. If he were to let up his guard for a fraction of a second, he would have had that food in front of him. That’s how real that temptation was.

But at this point of his life, God’s path for Jesus was that he not eat for forty days. And Jesus was ok with that. In that spirit he says, ***“It is written, ‘Man does not live on bread alone’”*** (4). There are more important things than bread. There are more important things than filling the stomach. There are, now listen to this, there are things even more important than life. Every soldier knows that. And the Christian knows it too. There is a hymn that says, *“God gives me my days of gladness, And I will Trust him still When he sends me sadness”* (CW 428:2). Jesus’ trust in the Father was unshaken.

**B.** So, Jesus is not going to give in on the bread thing. Now the devil shows the humble, starving son of a carpenter out in the desert that he could actually have a whole lot more than a loaf of bread. Satan is saying, “If God wants you to have this kind of life,” looking around in the desert, “maybe you should change masters.” ***“The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ‘I will give you all their authority and splendor…if you worship me.’”*** Be a toga-clad Roman senator sipping wine in an Italian garden. Have the best Arabian horses, the finest silk clothing, armies of servants. The wealth, the food, the luxury! It can be yours.

Maybe this seems a silly, foolish temptation. It is. Blessings from Satan? We know better. Jesus knew better. And yet it appeals to us. Rather than trust in a forgiving, loving God who sometimes says “No”, we all at times have chosen to believe the polished, veneered promises of the Father of Lies. Underneath there is rot. Likewise Jesus would have felt this temptation. There had to be an easier way than starving for weeks in the desert. Serve another master, and all the suffering and discomfort stops.

Jesus answers temptation with the perfect reply, ***“It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”*** Jesus makes it clear that whatever the promises of sin might be, he must do only what God says.

**C.** Finally, the Devil takes Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem. He quotes Scripture, twisting the Word of God. He suggests that Jesus should throw himself down from the temple. This final temptation is perhaps the most difficult to understand. Opinions vary.

\*Perhaps it was a shortcut to glory. Imagine all the crowds worshiping in the temple Jerusalem, seeing Jesus fall from a great height and land as gently as hummingbird. Wouldn’t they throng to him? That would be much easier than the path of Jesus’ life, leading through Gethsemane up to Golgotha.

\* Or maybe the devil was simply baiting Jesus like the bad guy in the saloon: “Son of God? Humph. Prove it. A real Son of God would jump.”

Bible scholars are divided about the thinking behind this temptation. But the point was to get Jesus to challenge God. Satan was daring Jesus to prove his credentials with reckless behavior. But here too, Jesus replies with a single short Bible passage, ***“Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”***

**II.** **Yes He Is the Son of God**

Each time, Satan tempted Jesus. He tempted Jesus to not trust God the Father in his path in life. Each time, Satan told Jesus to choose a more comfortable, more fun, more fulfilling life than what he currently had. Each temptation promised a quick resolution of a problem God wasn’t solving.

To each temptation Jesus answered, ***“It is written.”*** Now you know what that means, right? When he said, ***“It is written,”*** he was quoting the Bible.

Now, if you had a Bible open in front of you, you would see little footnotes. One of the things those footnotes do is tell you what words Jesus is quoting when it says, ***“It is written.”*** If you had that Bible in front of you, you would see that all three of Jesus’ answers are from the book of Deuteronomy chapters 6 and 8. I used to wonder, “Why did Jesus do that?” You know, in many Bibles, the Old Testament covers 1,000 pages. But all three of Jesus’ answers are from two pages right next to each other. To me, that failed to display the majesty of God’s Word. Why not one from Deuteronomy, one from Isaiah, one from the Psalms—something like that?

Here is some meaning behind Jesus’ answer: Deuteronomy was the book of the Bible written to the Israelites at the end of their 40 years of trials and temptations in the desert, while they stood on the edge of the desert near the Jordan River. Jesus quoted this book of the Bible after his forty days of temptation in the desert. Do you see why all three of Jesus’ Bible quotations came from Deuteronomy? What they tell me is not that Jesus had a narrow knowledge of Scripture in only quoting from two pages of his Hebrew Bible. Quite the opposite. He knew the Word of God perfectly. He knew the bits of it that exactly fit his life. He studied and knew God’s Word, and therefore he knew how to refuse temptations.

Our sermon reading can teach us a lot about the Devil, temptation and how to battle it. But unless you want me to preach for 45 minutes today, we really can’t cover all that territory. So I hope that next year, in the first Sunday of Lent, when this same lesson comes round again, we will look at that aspect of it. But today, we have looked at the primary reason that the Holy Spirit recorded these words in the fourth chapter of Luke. The first purpose of this is to teach us who Jesus is.

And what it tells us is… kind of like when the bad guy in the Western insults the hero and says, “If you were a man…” And do you know what the best of the good guys do? If forced to fight, they will. But they don’t fall for the insults. They walk away from the slurs.

Do you remember the challenge that the Devil threw in Jesus’ face? “If you are the Son of God…” Yes, this account indeed does prove he is the Son of God. He proves he is the Son of God, not by changing stones into bread, not by putting on all the trappings of powerful people, not by throwing himself off a building and landing light as a feather. He doesn’t fall for any of the temptations. He proves he is the Son of God through his Spirit-given self-control. He proves he is the Son of God by fending off temptation with the Word of God.

It is this Savior, this humble Son of God whom we celebrate in Lent. The one who went through the sufferings and temptations of this world, yet never gave in. And therefore he can be our Savior. Make Lenten repentance part of your daily life. Go to that sinless Son of God. He is a sympathetic high priest, tempted like us yet without sin. Though he is sinless, he never turns away any sinner who turns to him in repentance. He knows what it feels like to be tempted. Amen.