

First Sunday in Lent

Luke 4:1-13

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for the sermon is the Gospel heard before, Luke 4:1-13.

1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2 where the Devil continued to tempt Him for forty days. He ate nothing during those days, and, when they were over, He was very hungry.

3 The Devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread!"

4 Jesus answered him, "Scripture has said, 'A person will not live by bread alone.'"

5 The Devil took Him up, and, in a moment, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world. 6 The Devil told Him, "I shall give You all this authority and glory, because it has been given to me and I give it to anyone to whom I please. 7 So, if You worship me, all this will be Yours."

8 Jesus answered him, "Scripture has said, 'Worship the Lord, your God, and serve Him only!'"

9 The Devil took Him into Jerusalem and had Him stand on the summit of the temple. The Devil told Him, "If You are the Son of God, jump down from here! 10 For Scripture has said: 'He will order His angels about you, to watch over you carefully. 11 They will carry you in their hands and never let you stub your foot against a stone.'"

12 Jesus answered him, "Scripture has said, 'You shall not put the Lord, your God, to a test!'"

13 When the Devil had finished every way of tempting Him, he left Him until another opportunity would present itself.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,
Peace be with you

For those of you who may be unfamiliar with your Church history, the Christian Church - for centuries upon centuries - has always meditated on the Gospel account of Christ's wilderness temptations for the first Sunday in the Lenten season. We're not doing anything different today. This being the case, you can well imagine that there are thousands of different sermons in our history that all deal with and address these various temptations of Jesus, many of which are very good and edifying. Some not so much. Some treat these temptations as nothing more than a mere "how to," as in, *"Here's how Jesus overcame temptation when He was tempted, so here's what you need to do."*

Can you recognize the problem here? If Jesus is nothing more than a *"how to example"* for us to overcome temptation and sin, then that means He didn't need to suffer and die for us. We just need to step up our game and try harder. After all, if Jesus can do it, so can we! If Jesus is simply giving us an example to follow for overcoming sin and temptation, then all we need to do is follow the template. "Huh." Sadly, like I said, some of those sermons are out there. Some of those sermons may even be preached today, to the danger and detriment of the souls who hear such self-centered, works-righteous poison.

Why was Jesus tempted? Answer: For us of course! Centuries upon centuries of the faithful all proclaim and confess this Gospel Truth. Jesus was tempted in our place, as our perfect and sinless substitute. He was tempted and overcame such temptations because we can't. There's no "how to" about it!

What's really sad is that these are some very basic temptations. The devil doesn't come at Jesus with crazy, off-the-wall temptations that nobody else has ever had to endure. He comes at Jesus with the most fundamental desires like hunger, pride, arrogance, control, and greed. **"Turn these stones into bread." "Jump off the temple parapet".** If you really are the Christ and you really trust in God like you say you do, God will save you." "Tell you what I'm gonna do. If you just bow down to me and serve me, I'll put you in charge. I'll give you all these kingdoms." But Jesus didn't take the bait. Us? - Hook, line, and sinker! What's truly sad is that we don't even put up a fight. In fact, many times the fight arises when we're called out in our sinfulness. "Who

do you think you are?! How dare you judge me!” This is why Jesus was tempted. He did what we can’t do and don’t do.

But here’s the thing: I’m quite certain that you already know all of this. I know for a fact that you’ve been hearing it from me for 10-plus years now. You may not have been listening, but I know you’ve heard it. I’ve got 10 years of sermons to prove it.

So...let’s take a different tact for today. Why did Jesus fast? For those of you who worshipped with us this past Ash Wednesday, this may seem redundant, but it’s not. Why did Jesus fast before these temptations? Again, the answer comes down to vicarious satisfaction, which is just a fancy way of saying that He was our substitute. I don’t over-think this. The devil seduced our first parents to gratify their desires by eating; - eating the very food that God commanded them to abstain from. It’s not like they were starving! God richly provided them with all that they could possibly need. **“Although you may freely eat from every tree of the garden, 17 you shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil! For in the day when you eat from it you will surely die.”** [Genesis 2:16, 17.] God gave them every fruit of every tree to eat. There was no shortage of food. Their daily bread and their cup runneth over. And yet...it wasn’t good enough for them. They wanted more. They wanted to be like God. They wanted to be His equals. They wanted control. It should come as no surprise that some of our Christian forefathers have noted that the first sin wasn’t the sin of disobedient eating, but the sin of pride. The devil whispered gently in their ears, and they took the bait, hook, line, and sinker. This is why Jesus fasted. He fasted because we can’t and we don’t.

Now, some of you may already be scratching your heads because you know your Church history. You know that for centuries upon centuries Christians have observed the forty days of Lent by fasting...just like Jesus did. But...doesn’t that contradict the whole “Jesus isn’t our example, but our substitute” thing? Well...it depends how you look at it. If you think you need to fast like Jesus did so that you too can overcome sin and temptation, then you’ve got it all wrong. Jesus isn’t our example. He’s our perfect and necessary substitute. However, if you properly understand the whole concept of fasting, then Christ’s humble, faithful example will make perfect sense to you.

You see, the whole idea behind fasting is that the time you would normally use to eat (or whatever else) is instead used for prayer and meditation. Rather than eat (or whatever else you typically do), you take that time and read God’s Word and pray. Rather than feed your face, you abstain and let God feed you with the feast of His Bread of Life—His holy Word. You trust in God. You hold fast to His promise that He will richly and daily provide you with all that you need (not necessarily desire) for this body and life.

This is why Christians—for centuries upon centuries—have observed fasting, not just in Lent, but as a regular practice throughout the year. Yes, during Lent we also fast as a way of reminding ourselves of all that Jesus gave up for us. This is true. We don’t give up a sin/vice for Lent. That’s just plain wrong and foolish! We should do that all the time! Rather, we give up something near and dear to us as a way of remembering that Jesus gave up all of heaven’s glory and majesty to take on our flesh, all so that His flesh could suffer and die for us in our place. This is all good, right, and salutary. But...the main reason behind fasting is to set aside time for God.

So what about us? Do you fast? I’m asking from a Sabbath perspective; the perspective of resting and letting the Divine serve you. Even as I ask I’m reminded of a very old quote I read somewhere: **“If the devil can’t make you bad, he’ll make you busy.”** Sure, you may not be some terrible reprobate of a sinner. We can always think of a BUNCH of people who are way worse sinners than us right! But...are you too busy for God? Careful! God knows the Truth! How often we lament how famished we are in our relationship to God. **“I’m not being fed. My thirst isn’t being quenched.”** And yet...we stay away and abstain from the very gifts of life that He is constantly holding out to us and endeavouring to nourish us with. We spread ourselves so thin with all kinds of self-imposed busy work, and yet we lament how famished we are in relation to God. We complain of hunger pangs while we fill our faces, our hearts, and our minds with endless helpings of swill! And make no mistake: The devil makes sure to keep the buffet stocked full! It’s like a cruise ship to hell, with endless options and no limits. We gorge on the very things that do NOTHING for our souls; for our salvation.

So...I’ll say it again; ***If the devil can’t make you bad, he’ll make you busy.*** Understand: All our natural gifts and abilities are just that - gifts from God. They’re not “evil” in and of themselves. However, they cease to

become gifts when they instead become our gods; when they take the place of God; when we serve ourselves and not our God.

Consider your life. Consider your oh-so-busy schedule. Consider all the balls you're trying to keep juggling. Consider all the turbulence in your life... and then consider the fact that maybe that hunger pang you're feeling in your soul is the Good Physician calling you to fast and turn away from all that and instead turn and hold fast to Him. Consider the various vocations He gives you; the offices and estates He bestows upon you to serve Him by serving your family, your friends, and your neighbours. Consider how those God-given vocations may be suffering because you're too busy trying to do things that God hasn't given you to do; things that God hasn't given you to worry about. Perhaps a fast is in order.

Dear Brothers and Sisters: Here is your God and Lord, graciously and abundantly holding out to you His Bread of Life. Here is your feast that has no limits, no conditions, and no end. St. Augustine (ca. 400 AD) once said, "*The heart of man will not rest until it rests in Thee.*" This is why we take this special time known as "**Lent.**" This is why we carve out time out of the Church year - to re-focus on Christ and all that He gave up for us and our salvation. Look to this cross. Look to this font. Look to the feast. By all means, imitate the faith of your Lord. Imitate the faith of men like St. Paul and all those faithful Christians who've come before you. Fast...in faith. Focus...in faith. Feast...in faith. Fast, focus, feast...rest and rejoice. In His name and to His glory...**AMEN.**

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

Prayer of the Church First Sunday in Lent

P Let us pray to the Lord who hears the voice of His people, sees our misery and delivers us with a mighty hand and outstretched arm.

Brief Silence.

P For ourselves and all who are struggling with temptation, that God strengthen us to recognize Satan's lies, trust Christ's forgiveness, hold firm to the One who conquered Satan and resist the enticements of the devil, the world and our sinful natures, . Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P For the Church of God, that every division be overcome by the truth of God's Word, that in unity God's people proclaim Jesus to the world and that the Gospel turn unbelieving hearts to worship the Lord our God and serve Him only, Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P For those who are afflicted by doubts, that our Father would send the Holy Spirit to reassure them with the Saviour's promises, to grant them confidence to confess that "Jesus is Lord" and believe that God raised Him from the dead, . Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P For all who are troubled by the difficulties of life, [including _____], that the Lord who brought Israel out of Egypt with a mighty hand and outstretched arm would mercifully reach into their lives with comfort, faith and relief, Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P For hearts and minds eager to give back to our bountiful God, that by the working of the Holy Spirit we thankfully and willingly return to Him the first fruits of all He gives us, that He would use those offerings to extend His kingdom of grace, Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P For the places where we teach and learn God's Word, for this and all congregations of the AELC and the UMLA. For our pastors and their families and church workers, that they may be faithful and their service fruitful, and teach us that we do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God, Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P For this nation and those who make, administer and judge our laws; for the causes of peace and justice, here and throughout the world; for those in the armed forces who protect and defend us against our enemies; for laws that are good and just and for judges who are wise and faithful, for those who care for the sick and

injured, especially doctors, nurses, technicians, and all medical workers, the police the SES and fire brigades, that they carry out their calling with joy and dedication as they seek to preserve life and care for all, protect them from evil and guide them in paths that are pleasing to You. Lord in Your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

P For our marriages and families, that our Father would heal broken relationships, - strengthen healthy relationships, renew our love for each other with His love for us and, use us to encourage each other to stand fast in His Word enabling us to live in faith and life, Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P For those who come to receive Christ's body and blood, that our Father give us true repentance, a firm faith in Christ and confidence in His promise that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, . Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P For all who receive Christ's body and blood, that these gifts forgive our sins, unite us as one and enable us to rejoice together and suffer together as the body of Christ, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C Amen.