

Matthew 4:1–11
Invocabit (Lent I)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
February 26, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Today, on the first Sunday in Lent, we consider the temptation of Jesus by the Devil. Here, we see that Jesus fights the Devil in our place. As Adam was tempted by the Devil and fell, so Jesus, the new Adam, fights the Devil and wins. Adam's loss is our loss, but Jesus's victory is also our victory. This morning we consider how Jesus fought the temptations of the Devil in our place and teaches us both by His example, and by His power at work within us, how we are to overcome the evil one everyday with the Word of God.

Right after Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. There in the desert, our LORD fasted forty days and forty nights. In Scripture, the number 40 is associated with a period of testing. After Noah and his family entered the ark, it rained 40 days and 40 nights. Moses spent 40 years in Egypt followed by 40 years in the desert before leading God's people out of slavery. The people of Israel then wandered in the desert for 40 years, where God tested their hearts to humble them (Deut 8:2). The number 40 is associated with a complete time of testing, and a time of testing is often accompanied by fasting, that we might learn to depend upon God and His Word. For example, Moses and Elijah both fasted for 40 days on Mt. Sinai (Ex 34:28; 1 Kg 19). That's also why we fast during this 40 day season of Lent. It is a season of foregoing some of the pleasures of this life in order to concentrate more on our life with God.

After forty days and forty nights of fasting, Jesus was, of course, hungry. The Devil, the tempter, came to Jesus when He was most vulnerable, just as Satan always uses our weaknesses against us. The Devil slyly says: “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” Jesus is the Son of God. That much had just been proven at His Baptism, when God the Father said from Heaven: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Now the devil is saying: “Prove it! If you are the Son of God then let’s see a miracle!” Satan knew Jesus was hungry and he tried to work that for his advantage. Satan tried to lead our LORD off the path that was laid out for Him, the way of self-denial, suffering, and death, the way that leads to the cross, where Jesus will die as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The Devil was constantly working to veer Jesus off course, and that’s exactly what the Devil tries to do with you, too. He uses what you desire and long for to try to get you to turn a little bit to the right or a little bit to the left, knowing that one little change of direction over a long distance can make all the difference. If a boat strays slightly off course and doesn’t quickly refocus, a little slip up turns into a disaster. That’s how the Christian life is, too. The Devil tries to divert you just a little bit so that you take your eyes off of Jesus and go off course, making shipwreck of your faith (1 Tim 1:18). As sinners we daily fall into sin and go off course. But the life of repentance is a life of little readjustments, a life of refocusing our attention on the course ahead and on the one who is leading us. In repentance, we daily return to the promises God made to us in Baptism as we refocus on our Lord and on His cross.

Jesus answers the Devil’s first temptation: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Jesus thwarted Satan’s first attack using the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Jesus cites Deuteronomy 8:4, which says the LORD humbled the people of Israel by letting them hunger in the wilderness. Yet

the LORD was not slow to fulfill His promises. He graciously fed the Israelites with manna, the bread from heaven. God did this to show the Israelites that man does not live by bread alone but by the Word of God. The Lord creates, redeems, and sanctifies us through His promises. It is not enough to have all our physical needs met if we lack the Word of God. That's one thing we learn while fasting. Life is more than food (Lk 12:22). It is the Word of God alone that gives life.

The Devil could not tempt our LORD with food during this vulnerable time, so he moves on to tempting Jesus to tempt God the Father. The Devil took Jesus to Jerusalem, to the pinnacle of the temple, and said: "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down." Satan then cites Psalm 91: "He will command His angels concerning you . . . On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." Psalm 91 is about the LORD guarding His people in all their ways, protecting them as they do His will. But it is not the LORD's will that we deliberately put Him to the test. Jesus responds with the clear and direct order from Deuteronomy 6:16: "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test."

Here we see one of the Devil's best strategies employed against Christians: the Devil abuses God's Word. We stand against the schemes of the Devil with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, but oftentimes the Devil will use our own weapon against us. He will make us question Scripture, just like he did to Eve in paradise: "Did God really say?" Or the Devil will take Scripture out of context, like he does here with Psalm 91. In our postmodern world it seems more often that the Devil will try to contextualize everything in God's Word. Satan will say something like: "That's what the Bible said back then to those people, in that context, but that really has no bearing on what we do today. The world has changed so much for the better since then. Do you really want to go back to that outdated way of life?" Beware of such tactics! This is often how the Devil, that ancient serpent, slithers his way into a church body and destroys it from

the inside out. He tries to flip the tables and make us the judges of Scripture, using the spirit of this age as our guide. In reality, the Holy Scriptures are to judge us and set the standard for our way of life. The clear Word of God in its totality allows us to see how the Devil is misusing God's Word.

In his final attempt, Satan shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and says: "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." The whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19), but our LORD's kingdom is not of this world. Nations and empires come and go, but the Kingdom of God, the Church, remains forever because it is an eternal kingdom. It is laughable that the Devil offers the King of kings and Lord of lords something so paltry as all the kingdoms of the world. Those kingdoms, and everything else besides, ultimately belong to Jesus. The Devil tries the same thing with us. Maybe he doesn't offer us all the kingdoms of the world, but he does tempt us with the praise of the world, or with earthly power and influence, or on the other hand, with fear of being looked down upon. With Jesus, we say: "Be gone, Satan! For it is written: "You shall worship the LORD your God and Him only shall you serve."

Then the Devil fled confounded, at least for a little while (Luke 4:13). That's the nature of the Devil's work. He will never be finished trying to lure you from the true path until you breathe your last and our Lord takes you to Himself. Like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8), Satan continued pursuing Christ, tempting Him to depart from the course God had set out for Him (Matt 16:23), a course that would take Him through much suffering, and ultimately to death on the cross for the sins of the world. Even there, at our LORD's crucifixion, we hear that Satanic plea: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matt 27:40). All of Satan's temptations were designed to distract Christ from the very purpose for which He became man.

Yet Christ overcame the assaults of the Devil in our place so that He might die in our place. Satan would have prevented our LORD from dying for our sins, but our LORD withstood the attacks and the onslaught of Hell. He stayed the course, suffering and dying for your sins and for the sins of the world. Where Adam and we, the children of Adam failed, Christ overcame and won the victory.

The Devil will use any strategy to distract you from that reality. If he would even go after the very Son of God, how much more will he go after you, the baptized children of God! He wants you to forget that you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus. Resist him with the Word of God, and he will flee from you (James 4:7). Abide in His Word, and nothing can drive you off course. As we follow our Lord to the cross this Lent, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12). In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.