

Matthew 4:1–11
Invocabit
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
February 18, 2024

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,

The number 40 in the Bible indicates a period of trial, a time of testing or temptation. For 40 days and 40 nights the water inundated the earth in the Flood, bringing judgment upon mankind. For 40 years the people of Israel wandered through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land after 400 years of slavery in Egypt. Moses fasted for 40 days on the mountain as the LORD gave him commands for the people. For 40 days, Jesus fasted in the wilderness as he overcame the temptations of the evil one. We are now in the 40 days of Lent, a 40 day period of trial and testing, 40 days of self-denial and repentance as we allow the Word of God to prepare us for the celebration of Easter. Our Lord's resistance to the temptations of the Devil during his 40 day fast was for our sake, and it gives us an example to emulate during these 40 days of Lent and even for the entirety of our lives here on earth.

The temptation of Jesus occurs immediately after His Baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan river. It was then that Jesus began His public ministry leading up to His victory at the cross and in His resurrection from the dead. Jesus was baptized and then led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. This is how your life looks as well. At your Baptism, you became a member of Christ's body, the Church, whether you were baptized as an infant or as an adult. At that point you received the Holy Spirit, who then led you into the desert. Your entire life on this earth is a time of testing, a time filled with seemingly endless temptation. As a baptized child of God, you are called to resist those temptations by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The LORD does not leave you alone. He gives you the strength you need to resist, particularly the strength found in His Word.

When temptation comes, whether it comes from the world, the Devil, or your own sinful heart, keep in mind that the Holy Spirit is working through the trial to strengthen your faith and your reliance on God's Word. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. You are led by the Holy Spirit through the desert of this fallen world to be tempted by the Devil. Many people have a false, dualistic view of the nature of evil. They think that God and the Devil are two equal, but opposite forces. Remember that the Devil is not equal to God in any sense. As Luther, whose death date we commemorate today, would say: "the Devil is God's Devil." He is a fallen angel. He is part of God's creation, and the creation is subordinate to the Creator. Satan certainly exercises immense power in the world today, but his power is limited.

The LORD only allows the Devil to go so far and no further. There's nothing he can do against you apart from the will of God, as we see in the example of the Satan testing Job. The LORD said to Satan: "All that Job has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." Satan inflicted horrible suffering upon Job, taking away his possessions, his family, and everything he held dear. Yet Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped the LORD alone. Job confesses: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." Job never charged God with wrong because he continued to recognize God as the source of all that was good in his life. In the end, the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. When you come through a time of testing, you recognize the growth the LORD was giving all along, even if it came through the work of the Devil. In the end, God gives the growth.

The temptations the Devil attempts to lure our LORD with are instructive as far as the tactics the Devil uses against the baptized. Just like it was in the Garden of Eden when Satan tempted Adam and Eve, so does he tempt the people of God with something that at first looks good. “Your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” The Devil promises spiritual insight through eating. Wouldn’t it be great to have God’s perspective? There’s nothing wrong with eating, is there? What harm is there in satisfying your natural urges? “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food” (1 Cor 6:13), isn’t it? Eve saw that the tree was good for food, a delight to the eyes, and able to make one wise. Man disregarded God’s command, failed the test, and fell into sin. The Devil takes God’s good creation and encourages you to abuse it against a clear Word of God.

After fasting for 40 days and 40 nights, Jesus was hungry. And the tempter said to Him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” Jesus had the power to break his fast. He could have performed a miracle, like he would later at the feeding of the 5,000. But Jesus is careful not to follow the Devil’s lead and make this a repeat of the Garden of Eden. Instead, He continues to fast in order to show His dependence on God for all things and as a reminder that He, too, is mortal. According to His human nature, Jesus is capable of suffering hunger and thirst, bruising, torture, and death. Jesus, though Himself God, is dependent on God. And He is mortal. Our Lord’s fasting reminds us of these things.

The fasting of Jesus also gives us encouragement when we learn through His example the lesson of Deuteronomy 8:3: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Food and drink will help you in this life, but only the Word of God will nourish you for both this life and for eternal life. Even if you lose everything here, your life included, you will gain everything in eternity because of the life God gives to you in His Word.

This is also a reminder that fasting during Lent ought to include a renewed emphasis on God's Word.

Then the Devil takes the trust we have in the LORD and seeks to pervert it, tempting us to tempt the LORD. The deceiver took Jesus to the highest point of the Temple and told Him to prove His Sonship by throwing Himself down. Here, just like in the Garden of Eden, the Devil takes God's Word and twists it in such a way that it has an opposite meaning. It's true, as Psalm 91 says, that the LORD will command His angels concerning you and that on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. God often prevents us from harm by sending angels to protect us. But there's a huge difference between trusting in God's fatherly protection and in tempting God. God tells us in Deuteronomy 6: "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test." To test the LORD in a situation like this would show lack of trust. So often today, people tempt God through sins against conscience, through wilful sinning. They think things like this: "God likes to forgive and I like to sin, so that works out well." That's called tempting God. Do not tempt the Lord through wilful sinning or negligence.

Finally, the Devil 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 Devil so often promises temporal blessings at the expense of what is eternal. This is dangerous for sinners because we are often looking for immediate gratification. We want power, glory, and honor now. We want the praise and adoration of the world, or at least of the worldly-minded. Yet the LORD promises us shame and suffering, trials and temptations in this life. Only in the life to come will we enjoy the fullness of glory we have as baptized children of God. The ruler of this world will constantly tempt us with the vanity of this world, yet we are reminded of our far greater inheritance in Jesus Christ. Of course, Jesus rejects out of hand bowing down to worship Satan. He says: "Be gone,

Satan,” and cites Deuteronomy 6:13: “You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.” Don’t let anything, especially the transient things of this world, stand between you and the God who created, redeemed, and sanctifies you. Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.

Then the Devil left Him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to Him. Jesus fought against the Evil One and came through victorious with His army of angels. From Baptism on the Holy Spirit is leading you through the wilderness of this fallen world and the LORD sends the holy angels to protect you along the way and to fight for the cause.

Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We tremble not, we fear no ill; They shall not overpower us. This world’s prince may still scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He’s judged, the deed is done. One little word can fell him.

Continue arming yourself with the Word of God and prayer, because more temptations are on their way. Resist the Devil, firm in your faith, and he will flee from you (James 4:7; 1 Pet 5:8). And remember that in all temptations you undergo, God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with each temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it (1 Cor 10:13). Your strength comes from your LORD Jesus Christ, who already fought the battle for you. He is the valiant one, the LORD of Sabaoth, the ruler of the angels, and He holds the field forever. 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.