**Matthew 4:1-11**

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2** And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” **4** But he answered, “It is written, “ ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ” **5**  Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple **6** and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “ ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and “ ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’ ” **7** Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ” **8**  Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. **9** And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” **10** Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “ ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’ ” **11** Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

**“Great Deceiver, Greater Savior”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Lent has already started a few days ago with the service of Ash Wednesday. Foreheads marked with black ashes now enter into God’s House today washed cleaned. The first Sunday in Lent seeks now to remove any allusion about the battle we face as the baptized. The temptation of Jesus certainly shows us how to withstand the attacks of the evil one. However, none will fight like Jesus the perfect man who is perfectly God. From day one, the Devil sought after Him as an infant, attacked Him throughout His public ministry, assaulted Him by taking hold of His closest disciples, and made threats at Him on the cross.

The temptation of Jesus takes on a unique shape because it happens right after His baptism. The Father just said, “This is my beloved Son” (Matthew 3:17a) and the Holy Spirit sends Him into the wilderness. It is in this scene where we find no human illusions about life. All we have is darkness, emptiness, chaos, and nothing good surrounding the Son of God with the Devil making a grand appearance. Yet, this was not a fair battle because the deck was stacked in our favor. The temptation of Jesus turns the tables on the Devil. A better truth shines not on the Mount of Transfiguration, but in the darkness. This man would be victorious where Israel had failed. He was sinless able to stand in the place of sinners. When facing off with the old evil foe know that Christ has fought for you in the wilderness.

Man has lost the ability to fight in the wilderness against the tempter. This is not the same as the reality TV shows out there that seek to pit man against nature. What the famous Survivor, Survivor man, Dual Survivor and others deal with is the curse of “the thorns and thistles” that Adam had to face outside the Garden. However, when the serpent tempted our first parents something much worse occurred than the need to survive. The Fall into sin exchanged God’s Word for a lie, darkened the hearts of all generations, and opened the eyes of man to know both good and evil. In other words, man was in a wilderness and no longer in the Garden. Just to hear the Lord walking caused only fear. The shame of sin, sentence of death, and suppression by the Devil meant not surviving before God. It was only complete separation and darkness for all.

Our lost condition in the wilderness is to confess an inherited curse. We are the poor, miserable, lost children of Adam and Eve in thought, word, and deed. St. Paul said, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned…” (Romans 5:12). There is no going back because Adam went from complete holiness to complete failure and the Devil knows it. If man wishes to face off with the Devil by our own strength and goodness, the truth of his tempting power is tragic. Man is not morally neutral because even considering sin is an offense to God. Rather than a choice, it resides in sinful hearts. “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.”

Jesus went into the wilderness not to wander only to defeat the Devil for us. Just as God first spoke the promise of man’s salvation to the disgrace of the Devil, so the first act of Jesus after His baptism was to do the same. As an early church father puts it, “…this is what the Devil feared most of all: that after he had filled the world with sins, he heard there would now come someone to take away the sin of the world” (ACC). As the Second Adam, the Son of God, the Devil knew attacking Jesus had to make Him deny His destiny to the cross. Where it took only one question to fool our first parents, the Devil was the fool before our faithful Savior.

The first attempt came at just the right time when hunger ached within the body of Jesus. No one can say the Devil cannot be charitable to the needy, but he always does it for His own benefit. To turn stone into to bread was to tempt a miracle from God’s Son to feed his own face. Rather than to serve, it was to be selfish. Yet, Jesus said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” The blow to the Devil is that creation is not an end itself for man, but has a creator. Jesus trusted His Father in heaven for the Word is its own creating power. Just as God said, “Let there be light” out of darkness, so Jesus would feed five thousand by His Word or on the night before His death give Himself to eat and drink at the Lord’s Supper.

The second attempt on Jesus turned to identifying Him with glory and not the cross. It had to be in the holy city Jerusalem on top of the holy temple. What better place to do it, what greater glory could there be and the Devil sugarcoated it with God’s Word. Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” If He threw Himself off the temple, it would be an act of pride and all for show. Only Jesus saw glory by suffering and death, glory outside the holy city and temple, glory that could turn the cross into something good from God. St. Paul said, “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”

The third attempt in the wilderness drops the niceties before Jesus. This fallen angel, the Devil, dares to put himself in the place of God. Like a con artist, it comes with all the smoke and mirrors offering a promise he cannot keep. The father of all lies stood in the way of the true Father who sent His Son as the sacrifice. Jesus said with all authority, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” In order to cast out the idols that enslave a sinful world Jesus was to be our substitute. Only He could look beyond all darkness and pray, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39).

Satan is the enemy in the wilderness, but fear nothing because God has spoken. When suffering saps all your strength so there is no good to see, make the sign of the cross that binds you to Jesus by baptism to the Word made flesh. When falling into temptation Christ is there as the light to bring us out of the Devil’s deception with His Word, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). When fighting in the frontlines where chaos reigns, nothing gives comfort, and no one can stop the conflict. Remember the Word made flesh has taken the fight to the cross, has triumphed over the darkness by His resurrection, and sustains us in the wilderness by His true body and blood.

Fear nothing, for Lent greets us with the One God able to crush the serpents head. In this world is temptations of all kinds and behind it all is the Devil. He seeks to destroy the faith God gives to the saints and he does this by tearing us away from the Word. Our Savior knows whom we fight and so His angels serve us just as they ministered to Him. Better than angels is since the Father hears His Son, so too Jesus now hears us making the promise to each of His baptized, “When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him” (Psalms 91:15). When facing off with the old evil foe know that Christ has fought for you in the wilderness. His cross stands to be our promise of salvation and the pattern for life that will not lead us astray. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.