

**St. Paul Lutheran Church**  
**Grant Park, Illinois**  
**The First Sunday in Lent, March 10, 2019**  
**Luke 4:1-13**

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, 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. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 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. So if you worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"*

*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. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.*

Dramatic contests are something which we can't take our eyes off of. The tense back and forth football game which sets up a last second field goal to win or lose. The golfer staring down a 12 foot putt to win the Masters. The race that ends in a photo finish. Today, our gospel lesson is focused on a dramatic contest. However, instead of being focused on a sporting event, it is focused on a struggle between Jesus and Satan. What are they fighting over? The eternal future of our souls.

**“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, 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. The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.’”** Our struggle occurs right after Jesus has just baptized where God reveals Jesus is his promised savior. What is the first thing Jesus does after this revelation? He enters into battle against Satan.

God the Holy Spirit sets the stage for the battle when he leads Jesus out into the wilderness. Jesus hasn't eaten in 40 days. God sustained him for those 40 days, but now Jesus is experiencing hunger. Real hunger. Intense hunger. Hunger where you feel like doubling over and grabbing your stomach kind of hunger because your stomach is so empty kind of hunger. Satan believes this is a chance for him to pounce and he comes with his temptation, **“If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”**

Satan's temptation sounds very modern, doesn't it? As if he is saying to Jesus, “You say you are the son of God? Prove it to me by doing a miracle and I will believe it.”? It often sounds like a temptation he offers to us today. You believe Jesus is the son of God? Have him prove it to you by getting your high paying job back. Or have him prove it to you by putting that brand new car in your driveway. Or have him prove it by giving you your gourmet chef's kitchen.

What is Satan's goal with his first temptation? Isn't the goal of any “prove it” scenario trying to silence any doubters? A guy brags he can drive a golf ball 300 yards. No one believes him and they all start laughing at him. He asks for a driver, walks up to the ball, smacks it in the air (well over 300 yards) and drops the club while walking away. Boom. Case closed. End of story. Doubters and haters silenced. How did Jesus respond when the devil said prove it to him?

**“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone.’”** The devil gives Jesus a chance to prove it and how does he respond? He quotes the Bible. No chest thumping show of force by turning rocks into bread. No sarcastic miracle where he does the equally impossible turning a stone into cake rather than bread because he has the power to turn rocks into anything he wants. He uses simple words from the Bible to defeat the doubt Satan is trying to create about Jesus.

What can we learn from Jesus' first interaction with Satan? Jesus teaches us a valuable lesson about dealing with doubters and haters who challenge him in this world. How often haven't you wished when someone mocked or made fun of Jesus' power he prove those doubters and haters wrong through a dramatic show of force? Where is Jesus when you lost your job? Bam! Not only do you get your job back, but your boss is fired. Jesus can't get you a car? My Mercedes or Land Rover says otherwise.

I'm sure any of us would love this show of force, but what does Jesus say? **“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone.’”** He doesn't need to prove his strength by providing you

with things you want. He proves his strength by taking you back to the place where he has revealed himself. The Bible tells us everything we need to know about Jesus. It reminds us Jesus came to be our savior and he reveals his power in his way rather than in a way we can silence his doubters and haters.

Satan tries to do more than cast doubt about the fact Jesus is God. **“The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 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. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.’”** Satan claims with his next temptation to have power over the kingdoms of the earth and he can give it out any way he chooses. Does he have such power?

Again his temptation sounds rather modern, doesn't it? Christianity is being attacked in America. God obviously doesn't care about you otherwise he would protect you. What should you do instead? None of this would happen if you just get the right elected officials into power or the right justices on the Supreme Court. You know that. You just need to make sure it happens and do everything in your power to make sure it happens because God can't help you.

**“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”** Jesus' response exposes Satan's temptation as the lie it really is. Satan lies and tries to make it look like he is the one pulling and maneuvering the levers of power in the world by portraying God as powerless. However, Jesus reminds us we don't worship Satan. We worship God. A God who is in control. A God who is more powerful than politicians and Supreme Courts. A God who does what is best for us.

Satan has tried two tricks in effort to defeat Jesus. He has tried to get him to prove his strength. He has lied about giving power. He decides to try one last attack. What is the last thing which Satan attacks in our story? He goes after the very tool which Jesus has been using to defeat him: God's word. **“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.’”**

**“For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”** Jesus has shown us how to turn to God's word to defeat Satan, but Satan is smart. He knows the Bible too. He knows it better than you do. He knows it better than I do. He knows it better than any other normal human who has ever lived and he isn't afraid to use this knowledge.

Satan quotes Psalm 91 and uses a promise God makes in it to try and lure Jesus into a trap. He wants Jesus to test God's promise to protect and take care of him in a miraculous way. It brings to mind a story I have heard. There is a massive flood and a Christian is caught in it. Someone comes buy in a truck and urges him to come with. He says, “No thanks. God will take care of me.” The water gets higher and someone in a boat comes by. Same offer and same refusal.

Finally, the water forces the man on to his roof. A helicopter comes by and tries to rescue the man. He refuses. What happens? The man is swept away by the flood waters. He gets to heaven and he asks God, “Why didn't you rescue me?” God responds, “I tried. I sent a person in a truck, boat and helicopter, but

you refused each one.” What is the point of the story? **“Jesus answered, ‘It says: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”**

The man put God to the test and lost his life as a result. Do you ever do the same thing? I want this new dress, but my credit cards are maxed out and I’m late on the payments. God will provide for me. I can get it. I’m not sure the doctor has my best interest in mind. Chemo and radiation sound hard. I trust God will cure my cancer for me. God, I’m not sure what I should do with my life. I’m going to flip this coin and I’ll do this if it comes up heads and I’ll do this if it comes up tails and I trust you’ll guide the coin.

Sound silly? How often don’t we do something similar? We know God promises to watch our futures or take care of us, but we want it done on our terms. We test and want him to do things the way we want rather than according to his plan. We even fly to the passages which promise God works all things for our good or to gives us plans for a future and to prosper us to try and prove our point. Yet the truth remains, **“Jesus answered, ‘It says: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”**

The Lord says he doesn’t want to be put to the test, but he doesn’t say the same thing about us. Have you ever wondered why God allows Satan to still attack and test us? Satan’s attacks lead us back to Jesus. We cannot defeat Satan on our own. He overpowers us and mauls us. Yet, it is in our defeated state when we will find an important answer. Our salvation isn’t based in us. It is found in Christ and his victory over Satan. Jesus defeated Satan on our behalf.

**“When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.”** The devil left him and kept looking for an opportune time to defeat Jesus. He never found it, because Jesus defeated Satan each and every time he came calling. Peter’s temptation to avoid the cross, the crowd’s temptation to become a bread king after feeding 5,000 and the Jewish leaders temptation to prove himself in his trial. Jesus defeated Satan each time to save you and me. Jesus, thank you for your victory. Amen.