

THE SERMON SUPPLY



A Resource from
Region 6



First Sunday in Lent, Year A

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Gospel Text - Matthew 4:1-11

Matthew 4:1-11

¹ Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. ³ 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,

'One does 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 placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ saying 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,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' "

⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do 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, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.' "

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

SERMON TEXT:

Grace and Peace from our Living Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen

Today we celebrate the first Sunday of Lent. Lent is a period of penitential spiritual practice and almsgiving for the purpose of preparing our spirit to receive the good news of the resurrection.

So, how do we begin this preparation? With a scripture on temptation! It makes us acknowledge, whether we are observing a Lenten fast or not, that we are surrounded by temptation and that it is something that we cannot escape. God teaches us this, because God knows us well...

Yes, temptation, a very human experience.

Usually, when we talk about this scripture, we say something along the lines of the Devil coming to Jesus in the wilderness when he was at his most vulnerable. In the wilderness, all alone, no food or water, Jesus was at his weakest. This makes sense to us.

Why would the Devil challenge Jesus at his strength? Even the Devil would be wary of the triumphant incarnation of God, especially if Jesus were ready to do war with evil, holding his shield and sword, plated in armor, surrounded by the heavenly armies of angels.

So he would bide his time, until Jesus was weak and vulnerable. But it occurred to me that physically here that may have been the

case, but that explanation ignores why Jesus was in the wilderness to begin with.

Jesus was driven in the wilderness, not so that he could become weak, but scripture says it is so that he would be strengthened for the mission to come. Jesus' physical body was weak, but his spirit was stronger than it ever could have been. And THAT is why Jesus wins this encounter.

The Devil expects to meet a weak human adversary. But Jesus teaches us here that we cannot rely on our own strength (our own abilities, talent, or tools) but we must only rely on the strength of God's Spirit to beat the Devil, and all the forces that defy God.

The Devil believes that the temptation to turn rocks into bread would have been a moment of spiritual weakness for Jesus. The Devil believes the same in the temptations of testing God by Jesus throwing himself from the temple's roof and giving into Satan by worshiping him.

As Jesus would go on to turn over all sorts of tables, real and in the human mind, the Devil wasn't challenging Jesus' weakness. The Devil couldn't understand that he was challenging Jesus' strength. The Devil reveals his flaw by in effect saying to Jesus, "You can do this on your own. You don't need God."

And THAT is the true temptation that Jesus is facing, to rely upon his human strength, instead of God's Divine Strength. This is a temptation we face every day.

It you think that the devil only tempts you when you are weak, you are dead wrong. Satan loves to challenge us when we think we are strong and easily tempted to turn our backs to God.

It happened at the tower of Babel, when the people thought they could achieve anything through their own power and ingenuity. It happened when Moses brought forth water from the rock and took credit for the miracle. It happens throughout the history of the people of Israel as again and again when they turned from God to worship works of Man.

We often think it is our weakness that is our problem, but even the Devil knows that what we consider our strength is our real weakness.

That's why people tend to not come to church when things are going great for them in their lives. They feel fine. They think they are doing it on their own. Everything is great. And then something bad happens and suddenly church is filled with people.

We saw this after 9/11. People realized they needed to connect with God. There was too much unknown in the world and the people realized they needed God in their lives. That lasted a few weeks and then things returned to normal when once again the Devil tempted them to rely upon their own strength.

So, why do we begin with this text for Lent? It is to help us to realize that it isn't our own strength that we should rely upon, but God's.

2 Corinthians 12:10 says, "When I am weak, then I am strong." St. Paul is teaching the Corinthians that God's power is made perfect in our weakness, because it is in our weakness that we realize our need for God. It is possible that we need to understand that our strength counts for nothing when we rely upon God, that God IS our true strength.

And God promises to be our strength throughout God's interactions with us in history. Isaiah 40:29 says, "God gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless."
God promises to be our strength and our help.

Our challenge is to realize our need for God in our life, not only when we are weak, but also when we feel strong. Then, we can lay aside our confidence in our own power and truly rely upon God and God's strength.

Perhaps this Lent, we can learn this lesson, that relying upon our own strength is also a temptation that should be avoided. God is in charge. God is the one who knows what is going on.

And that God is the one with the only true power in our lives to begin with.

Amen.

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