

INI - SDG

1st Sunday in Lent

March 13, 2011

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Hecla, SD

Text: Matthew 4:1-11 ***Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. 3 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'***

Theme: OUR LORD WAS TEMPTED AS WE ARE

- I. Tempted to distrust God
- II. Tempted to test God
- III. Tempted to be disloyal to God

Dear fellow wanderers through this desert, redeemed in Jesus Christ,

Lent has been described as a scene of battle for men's souls. In today's text we find just that, don't we. A battle for the salvation of our souls. We find two princes engaged in combat. We hear how the prince of the power of the air, the devil, tempted the Prince of life, who is the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ. As we come upon this battlefield we can rejoice because we hear that Christ was victorious. The writer to the Hebrews says of Jesus, ***"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."*** (Heb 4:15) Jesus was tempted in every way that we are tempted. The old evil foe regularly engages in battle with the Children of God. He tempts us just as he tempted our Savior. As we examine our text today, we not only see the weapon Jesus used to battle Satan, but we also see that Jesus was victorious in every single one of His battles. Let us examine how even as the devil tempts us, so too he tempted Jesus to distrust God, to test God, and to be disloyal to God. May God the Holy Spirit ever strengthen us by His Word as we find that the Lord is our refuge!

TEMPTED TO DISTRUST GOD

The setting couldn't be more different from our Old Testament lesson (Gen 2-3) to our

sermon text. In our Old Testament reading we heard just how blessed Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden. God had given them everything. They could eat from any of the trees in the Garden except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Yet when the devil came to the blessed man and woman, they chose to disobey God, give heed to the temptation, and eat of the forbidden fruit.

But the scene we come upon in our sermon text couldn't be more different, than the plush conditions of the Garden of Eden. Jesus had just been baptized in the Jordan. The Holy Spirit had descended and remained on Jesus. God the Father had spoken words of endorsement and encouragement to His Son. Then He was led by the Spirit to the desert. In the desert where there was nothing for Jesus to eat. For forty days and forty nights Jesus went without food. And consider how amazing it is to hear that Jesus was hungry! For us this is normal. But for true God to be hungry? Here we see the depths of humiliation the Son of God was willing to go to save us. Conditions could not be more different for the second Adam, than the first Adam. Adam in the Garden had countless trees to eat from, Jesus in the desert had nothing to eat and He was hungry.

The devil tries to capitalize on those hunger pangs to tempt our Lord. As Satan so often does, he tempts with questions. ***"If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."*** It's as if the devil were saying: "If it's really true, Jesus, that You are the Son of God, making these stones into bread should be no problem. We're here alone in the middle of the desert. No one will know. You're hungry and here's an easy way to prove that you really are the Son of God. Surely God does not want His 'beloved Son' to go hungry, does He?" Seems harmless enough, doesn't it? We can hardly see any harm in bread, can we? After all we all need to eat. Jesus was hungry. He'd done bigger miracles than changing stone into bread.

But what this sly devil was doing, was tempting Jesus to not trust in God. To not trust that God would take care of Him. To convince Him that feeding His flesh was the most important thing. But Jesus replies, ***"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"*** Notice the humility of the Son of God. He does not argue back with His authority as the Alpha and Omega. Rather, Jesus points to Scripture, Deuteronomy 8:3. Earthly bread is secondary to the Bread from heaven. Jesus belly was not His first concern, living on every word that comes from the mouth of God. The devil would have Jesus use His power to serve Himself. Jesus was not about to do so.

The devil comes after us with the same temptation, doesn't he? He tempts to compromise our trust of God for the needs of our flesh. He tempts us to place our bodily needs ahead of our spiritual needs. Maybe it's a great job offer or a scholarship at a university that is hard to pass up, but would result in you moving away from your church. Maybe it is choosing work over church. Maybe it's spending 10 more minutes in the field rather than taking 10 minutes to have a devotion with your family. Whatever the devil's approach or angle might be, know this, that He does tempt us to distrust God and take matters into our own hands.

How have we handled such temptations? Have we always trusted God above everything else? Hardly! So often we try to make bread out of stone by taking things into our own hands. And in doing so we sin against God. We sin against the very first commandment by not TRUSTING in God above everything else. Yet what do we see with Jesus? Jesus who is our Substitute under the law? We see Jesus standing victorious on the battlefield, conquering

this temptation for us and being faithful to God in our place!

TO TEST GOD

"Alright," the devil would say, "You want to quote Scripture - here's Scripture for you." The devil takes Jesus to a high wall in Jerusalem, possibly one with a 400 foot drop into the Kidron Valley. The devil then questions Jesus again and quotes from Psalm 91, "***If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you, and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'***" "God said it. It's His Word. Are you afraid God won't keep His word? Don't you believe God will do what He says He will do?" The devil would have Jesus test God and make God prove that He means what He says in His Word.

It is true that the devil quoted from Psalm 91, but he purposefully left out a very important part. In Psalm 91:11 we read, "***For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways.***" Yes, God promises to watch over and protect all His children. He promises to provide His angels to protect us, **to keep us in all our ways.** To keep us in all our ways means that as we live in accordance with the way God wants to live. But the devil loves half-truths. He loves to misquote, misapply Scripture and lead into temptation and sin by twisting the Word of God.

Again, notice how Jesus replies. He does not reply with a logical argument as Eve did in the Garden. He does not call upon the authority that is His as the Son of God. In humility Jesus relies on the power of the simple and clear Word of God to combat Satan. "***It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'***" Why test God when there is a perfectly fine staircase over there? To put God to the test is contrary to the simple and clear Word of God as Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6.

He was tempted as we are, isn't He? Aren't we tempted to tempt the LORD our God? How many times haven't we, knowing what God's Word says, been tempted to either make God prove He is serious about something or tempted to push God to see what we can get away with? And how often don't we give into those temptations! Even if it was testing God just once, that makes us guilty of all and worthy of God's eternal wrath. But what do we see with Jesus? We see our Champion standing firm in the face of the very same temptations we fall into. Our Lord was tempted as we are, yet without sin!

TO BE DISLOYAL TO GOD

It seems that the devil was getting frustrated with Jesus. He had not proved such an easy target as did Adam and Eve. But the devil continues to lie and manipulate. He finally tries to appeal to greed for power. Here is the Son of God who from eternity had all authority in heaven and on earth, but now had taken on the humble form of a servant. From eternity He had all the riches of the universe at His fingertips, but now He was poor and without a place to lay His head.

The devil takes Him to a high mountain and shows Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. Where or how this took place, our minds struggle to comprehend. But this we know by faith - it really happened. And the devil really tempted Jesus saying, "***All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.***" All the power and wealth and might of the kingdoms of the world would be a great temptation to the Son (as it were) of a

carpenter. Everything anyone could ever desire, right at His fingertips - if only He would bow down and worship the devil.

This is the last straw for Jesus. For the first time addressing him by name, Jesus says, **"Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'**" Satan would have Jesus be disloyal to His Father. He would have Him worship Satan instead of God. And this Jesus cannot tolerate, for it goes against the 1st and greatest commandment.

Someone once said that sin can kind of be like a painting. If it's in the right frame it doesn't look so bad. Satan loves to put idolatry in a pretty frame, doesn't he. He shows us how fun the pleasures of the world can be on TV. He makes the women of the world look so appealing to our flesh. He makes fame and power look so wonderful. Satan would have us believe that we have to look out for number one - ourselves! He would have us be disloyal to our Father in heaven.

A few weeks ago, we heard Jesus say, **" No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."** (Matt 6:24) But Satan would have us believe that the pursuit of happiness should be our first goal in life. It's one of our "inalienable rights" we are told. Not so, our Savior says. **"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."** (6:33)

We are assaulted by these temptations, too, aren't we? How do we fare? Do we stand firm at the time of temptation? Do we always and only seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, knowing that God will take care of us? We don't, do we?! We covet, we lust, we seek first our own kingdom, rather than the kingdom of God. Time and again we have been disloyal to God and instead bowed to the gods of this world - pride, possessions, and power.

While we have failed to fear, love, and trust in God above everything else, Jesus did not give into such temptations. Jesus was tempted just as we are, yet without sin. He was our Substitute under the law and obeyed it perfectly in our place. The devil tried to get Jesus to distrust God, just as he does with us, but Jesus did not sin and by faith God credits Jesus victory to our spiritual account! The devil tried to get Jesus to test God, just as he does with us, but Jesus did not sin in this way either, and by faith God credits Jesus' victory to our spiritual account. And the devil tried to get Jesus to be disloyal to God, even as he tries and so often succeeds with us, but Jesus remained loyal to God unto death, and God credit's Jesus' victory to our spiritual account. Jesus was victorious in His all battles over sin and by His amazing grace gives His victory! Praise be to our Champion, Jesus, now and forever!

*With might of ours can naught be done, Soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the Valiant One, Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is.
Of Sabaoth Lord, And there's none other God;
He holds the field forever. AMEN! (TLH 262:2)*