

**SERMON—Matthew 4: 1-11—First Sunday in Lent—Rev. Timothy W. Sadler, Pastor—
Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Lancaster, PA.**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Right before the lesson for today, Jesus was baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit, and declared by God to be God's beloved Son. What exactly does that mean? The disciples think it means Jesus will be a great warrior king, one who will overthrow Roman rule and reestablish Israel as a nation of wealth and power.

But what does it really mean to be the Son of God? Jesus needs to wrestle with this issue, too, and make some very intentional choices about how he'll live his life and what shape his ministry will take. And so, Satan shows up on the scene to help that decision-making process along.

At this point in the story Jesus is famished from a long fast, and for humans, that's a critical place to be. The human body requires sustenance if it's to think well and be strong enough...to withstand the forces of life.

So, at a critical time in this story, Satan shows up to take advantage of the situation. The thing is, Jesus is a person of prayer, so I suspect he wasn't just going without food for 40 days and fixating on all those things he'd eat to make up for it. That's probably what I would do.

But I believe Jesus spent this time in prayer and in deep communion with God, because that's what Jesus DID in his life. He nurtured his connection with God. And because he spent this time with God, Jesus emerged from this whole experience with much greater clarity about who he is and why he came to earth.

And that time of temptation actually helped him do that. Remember, it was the Holy Spirit of God who led Jesus out into the wilderness specifically so he could struggle with all of these things.

Satan probably thought he was in charge, but God was in everything that happened all along. We have to trust that's true for us too.

The temptations themselves were very real. If they were easy to resist, they would've served no purpose.

Satan offered Jesus some very real ways of getting people's attention and making certain everyone would know Jesus is the Messiah. And in the process, Jesus would be helping...a lot of people: he'd be feeding the hungry and giving everyone something to believe in again.

What Satan's trying to do is tempt Jesus to think about what it means to be God's Son—but to this on Satan's terms, not God's. Satan wants to be the one who determines the purpose and direction of Jesus' life and ministry. Satan wants Jesus to look at all this from a worldly point of view, not from the perspective of the Divine.

Satan is offering Jesus the power to become the greatest Messiah on earth, with more wealth and prestige than Jesus could imagine. Satan's trying to convince Jesus that with all that wealth and power, Jesus could do a lot of good. It's so easy to justify going about things the wrong way if we say we can get good out of it.

But Jesus refuses to fall into that trap. In this life, there are no easy ways to follow God. Yes, we do have joy and we have certain pleasure in life, but it takes a lot of soul stamina to live for God through the difficult times as well as the easier times. It takes a lot of inner strength to keep on trusting and believing in a God of love no matter what.

Basically, what Satan does is try to tempt Jesus to become the Messiah without the cross. Satan was offering Jesus an easy way out of his mission.

But it wasn't God's way. The whole point of these temptations is to raise the question: what kind of Messiah is Jesus going to be and who has the right to determine that? Who gets to say what path Jesus should follow?

If we are honest, we'll admit we want what Satan offered Jesus: a life here on earth with guarantees. Imagine knowing that we could have guarantees for ourselves and our loved ones.

The problem is, and this is what Jesus knew, some guarantees come at too high a price. Nothing is worth stepping off of the path God sets before us; not all the wealth in the world—or guarantees of safety.

Satan wanted Jesus to believe that Satan could create Heaven on earth, but that's the biggest illusion of all. We're not here to live in safety and comfort; we're here to face this life...head-on and learn something about trusting God. You can't learn to persevere in faith and love and trust unless you have experiences that will help you learn to do that.

What Jesus wanted, more than anything, was to do the will of God. For Jesus, it wasn't a question of what Satan wanted or even what the human Jesus thought should happen. For Jesus, it was and always was, a question of God's will.

The other important thing about this lesson is that Jesus didn't just mindlessly quote Scripture in order to prove a point. Jesus knew the God whom Scripture talks about.

Jesus was able to stand his ground because he was grounded in the love and mercy of the God who loves him. It was because of his relationship with God that he had the strength of presence to stop Satan in his tracks.

By the grace of God and the power of Christ, we too have the strength of presence to not get caught up in the easy promises of this world or be defeated by the evil in it. We too know the God whom Scripture talks about; we too know the Lord who lived this life and who now walks it with us. We couldn't have better company for the journey.

Thanks be to God. AMEN