

Year A – Matthew 4:1-11
1st Sunday in Lent
March 1, 2020

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

Have you ever been tempted to do something you know you probably shouldn't do? Sometimes they are small temptations with little to no negative consequence. Such as, the temptation to have just one more piece of chocolate or one more scoop of ice cream, etc. Other times, those temptations we fall prey to come with more drastic consequences. For instance, when I worked from home for six years and the kids were very small the temptation to go downstairs, check the fax machine, the answering machine on the phone and do some work all hours of the day was just too great of a pull and ultimately put a huge strain on my relationship with Amanda and resulted in me missing some precious moments with Lauren and Matt. Or, there is the time in college when a group was travelling out of town to an away Panther football game. One of the guys had a friend at the rival school who said we could crash at his place for the night and come home Sunday. I knew I had a busy week ahead of me. A major exam Monday and a large paper due Thursday. I knew what the proper decision was, but the temptation was just too great of a pull and I gave in. Sure, we had a fun weekend, but the Monday exam – well, let's just say I needed all the extra credit I could get my hands on the remainder of the semester.

Each time I read this text about Jesus' temptation in the wilderness I inevitably fall into the proverbial trap of thinking that if Jesus can resist the devil's sinister ways then, why can't we? Why can't we always resist the temptations of the world we live in turning us from trusting God and carrying out God's will? Why are we constantly attracted to false promises, dreams, hopes and seeking first our own needs? Instead of finding hope, strength, and good news in the text, at times, I seem rather to be left with a sense of despondency, failure, and unworthiness.

And perhaps therein lies the tempter lurking in our midst luring us into a sense of despair and doubt. Or perhaps the temptation lies in the belief that we are “Christ-like” and therefore should be able to meet any temptation thrown our way. If Jesus can do it, then so can we? We just need to try harder, pray more diligently, and have more faith.

Each of us can find ourselves somewhere in this text. Daily, hourly, or perhaps by the minute we are tempted in some form. Temptations come at us seemingly like a barrage of angry hornets from a disturbed nest. We flail, flap, and flee but their torment is relentless and inescapable. The temptations to satisfy personal desires at the expense of others, to turn to lust or greed for happiness, to talk about a friend, colleague, or peer behind his/her back, to be lulled away from relationships with family, friends, and God by jobs, addictions to gambling, pornography or something else. We each find ourselves in the wilderness, alone, famished by fending off the manipulative voices and promises of the evil one. Why can't we be more like Jesus? Will we ever win this battle? The answer to that question is emphatically NO because we are not Jesus.

This text is not a portrait of how, like Jesus, we too should be able to withstand the enemy's tactics with perfection. This text is about revealing Jesus Christ's true identity. It is about God's ongoing battle with the evil forces of the world. It is about showing that unlike the old Adam, Jesus the “new” Adam is the One sent by God who undoubtedly WILL resist the Tempter's snare. Jesus is fully divine, fully God, but Jesus of course is also fully human, which means Jesus enters into and experiences the messiness of life including the temptations Adam and Eve succumbed to, the Israelites fell host to in not trusting God during their wilderness wandering, Judas Iscariot fell victim to in betraying Jesus, and Peter gave into in denying him. Temptations each of us ultimately fall prey to from time to time in our faith journeys.

Freshly off His Baptism by John in the river Jordan, watching the Spirit descend on Him and speak words we heard last week at His transfiguration, “This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased,” He is immediately led by the Spirit to be tested and tempted by Satan in the wilderness. It does not take Jesus long to experience the decision of

trusting God or taking Satan's bait. Jesus chooses God and God's word alone. Jesus wins the first battle against enemy forces and in so doing is strengthened and further prepared for His ministry that lies ahead, his journey toward Jerusalem, and His greatest battle yet.

We are not Jesus and on our own cannot withstand the constant bombardment of temptations Satan throws at us. The good news is that God saw then and continues to see now the relentless anguish and hostility we encounter daily because of the forces of this world. We need not leave here today in fear that we have to be perfect like Jesus. We need not wake up tomorrow in a cold sweat with a sense we are alone because we aren't. The good news is that Jesus has gone into the wilderness ahead of us and withstood the enemy on our behalf. The good news is that God's Spirit continues to lead us, comfort us, and strengthen us during our wilderness experiences. The good news is though we may give in to temptation, turn from God, and seek things of this world, God continues to call out to us and bind us in the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

During Lent we journey with Christ to the cross. It is a journey where we will be tempted by the world to spend our time elsewhere rather than at worship, where we will be lured away from a season of prayer by March Madness and spring sales, and where instead of fasting for a world where many lack water and bread we will be tempted to hoard and satisfy our own needs. It is most certainly true we will succumb to the temptations around us but that does not mean we simply give in. On the contrary, we are united to Jesus Christ and are Christ's body in the world and we therefore trust He is with us and in every step of the journey when faced with temptation we pray and trust for His continued guidance and strength.

Just after the devil left Jesus, angels came and waited on Him. We, too, live surrounded by a great chorus of witnesses helping guide us, comfort us, and carry us through our wilderness moments and provide strength to stand up the temptations we daily encounter. The good news is that when we fail this chorus of witnesses proclaims the good news of God's promise in Christ that we are forgiven and forever a child of God clothed in Christ.