**St. Paul’s Lutheran Church
Wildwood, Missouri**

**The First Sunday in Lent**

**March 1, 2020**

**Matthew 4: 1-11**

You all know the story. With a desire to shower his love and care upon a being outside of himself, God created man. So, Adam and Eve became the object of God’s love. They became his family and he was their Father. And God took care of his family. He took care of his children. He placed them into paradise, into a garden which would supply for them all that they needed. *“You are free,”* God said*, “to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat it you will surely die.”*

He was generous in his care for them; the whole garden was theirs, the whole thing. . .save one tree. He walked with them, talked with them and loved them as any father would love his children. Life was perfect in paradise, unblemished by anything evil. No wrong existed in the garden, only good. No wrong existed in their relationships with one another, there was only good.

Then, four little words changed everything. *“Did God really say,”* asked the tempter? It’s amazing isn’t it? With four little words the battle to destroy and break up God’s family had begun. Satan is very cunning, isn’t he? He never comes right out and says, *“Here, sin!”*  He never directly says, *“Take it! Eat the forbidden fruit.”* Notice what he does. He attacks God’s credibility. He attacks his word. That’s where all temptation begins, it begins with doubting God’s word*. “Did God really say?”* And with that, the temptation takes root, Eve listened and began to doubt God’s goodness.

You know the story. One little bite of fruit for Eve, one little bite for Adam, and the long, sad saga of human history begins. The long, sad saga of our history begins. The goodness that was in their hearts was now evil. The trust they felt for God now turned to contempt. Their faith in their Father became faithlessness and instead of being their Father, God became their enemy. God, our heavenly Father, had lost his family. They could no longer be in his presence for he was good and they were evil.

Such became our lot as descendants of Adam. Such became August’s lot as a descendant of Adam . . . no pun intended. We inherited this mess of a sinful world from them. Our lives are now filled with temptation and sin. That is the legacy Adam left us. As we can all attest to here today, we are tempted to sin just about every minute of every hour of every day. And, to our shame, we far too often yield to that temptation, don’t we? We far too often yield to Satan and turn from our heavenly Father choosing instead to remain outside the family.

Yet, God’s love for Adam and Eve and for all their offspring continued. As any Father, or parent whose children have strayed would want, God wanted his family to come back to him. And what we read throughout the rest of Scripture is how God worked to bring back his family to himself. How would he do that? God would have for himself another Son, a second Adam, who would succeed where the first Adam failed. He would have a true Son: One who would stand up to Satan and who would not fall to his temptations, One who would not doubt the word of God but always trust it, One who could reconcile man with God and bring God’s family back together.

Enter Jesus of Nazareth. In his baptism God confirms his feelings toward this, the second Adam. From a heavenly voice we hear, *“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”* The work of Jesus was now to begin and his first task was to square off with Satan in the wilderness. Jesus was to go toe to toe, *“mano a mano”* with the Prince of Darkness, to do what Adam failed to do, to do what we so often fail to do: resist the devil.

My dear friends in Christ, what takes place here in the wilderness is no small thing. This was no minor step on the road to recovering the family of God. As we read each temptation, we see our salvation in the balance. Remember, all it took to ruin this world, all it took to ruin us, was four words and a small bite of fruit. Satan knew that all he needed to do, was to get Jesus to sin once, just one small sin, and the victory would be his. No one would be left to be faithful to God for us. You and I and the world would be lost forever. This meeting in the wilderness was a struggle of cosmic proportions. It was imperative, absolutely imperative, that Jesus resist the tempting of the devil.

 Now, don’t underestimate Satan’s resolve; he wants to win at all cost and he doesn’t like to fight fair. Notice at what point he comes to Jesus, “*After fasting forty days and forty nights. . .,”* Jesus was weak with hunger. If you want to get a picture of how the devil works, this is it. He never comes to tempt when you are strong. 1st Peter 5:8 tells us that *“our enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”* Like a lion on the hunt he never goes after the strongest animals, but the weakest, hoping for an easy kill. Jesus, hungry and weak, seemed a perfect victim. Notice also how the temptations of Jesus parallel the temptations of Adam and Eve.

Immediately, like he did with Eve, Satan begins to attack the credibility of God’s word. In his baptism God said, *“this is my Son.”* In the first temptation Satan tries to get Jesus to doubt that. *“If you are the Son of God. . .”* he says. Satan’s challenge was not to see if Jesus could turn stones into bread. He didn’t really care if Jesus could perform such a miracle. Satan knew that the true Son of God would trust God above all things. He would trust that God was caring for him even if the earthly evidence, in this case hunger, indicated otherwise. If Jesus turned the stones into bread, Jesus would have shown that he did not trust God to care for him. He would, in essence, prove that he wasn’t the Son of God. But, Jesus is the true Son of God and he responds with the only weapon capable of combating the devil: he responds with the word of God. *“It is written, ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that come from the mouth of God.”* As an aside, if there is any reason to memorize Scripture it is here. God’s word is our tool for fighting Satan.

Getting back to it, though, we see that Satan does not give up easily. Filled with poison and hatred for God and his family, he tries again. Here too, notice what Satan does: he attacks the credibility of God’s word and character of God, just as he did with Eve in the garden. There, when Eve tells him that God said if she eats of the fruit she will die, Satan responds, *“You will surely not die.”* Again, he wanted her to doubt God’s word.

With Jesus he does the same thing. To paraphrase, *“If you are truly the Son of God, he would never let any harm befall you. You should be able to do what you want. See if he is true to his word. See if he will spare you. Throw yourself from the temple.”* But, again, Jesus remains faithful. He would not test God’s word. Here too, Jesus replies with the certain word of God. *“It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”*

Seeing that Jesus is not so easily tempted, Satan tempts him with what is the desire of most men: power. That was the temptation which pushed Eve to sin. *“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and your will be like God, knowing good and evil.”* *“You will be like God.”* This is at the heart of every man. We want to be our own God’s, to rule over our own lives without interference, to do what we want, when we want it without worry or concern about being judged. That sort of power was too much for Eve, and so she ate.

With Jesus, Satan shows him all the kingdoms of the earth and promises to give them to him if he would simply bow down and worship him. This was no false promise. Satan’s offer of power was real. Satan, as the king of the world was in a position to give all the kingdoms to Jesus. The devil would have gladly relinquished control of the earth for the sake of an ultimate victory over God.

Yet, there is more to this temptation than simply power. In a way, it is the most insidious and alluring of them all. Remember. How was Jesus to win back the kingdoms of this world? How was he to bring back God’s children? Through the cross. By his death and resurrection.

You see, Satan was tempting Jesus with a short-cut. He could bypass the cross. He could bypass the agony and suffering, the shame and cruelty which was waiting for him at Golgotha. Satan would give to Jesus what looked like a victory, but, in actuality, was a loss. One more time, however, Jesus takes up the sword of the Spirit, which is God’s word, and he fights away the devil. *“Away from me Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”* With that, the devil left him and the angels came and ministered to him. Jesus had resisted. He succeeded where Adam and Eve failed. He battled Satan. He stood toe to toe with him and withstood his temptations. It was over. Or, was it?

Our tendency after reading about the success of Jesus in combating the temptations of Satan is to think that this was it. Temptations over and done with, now let’s move on to the miracles and teachings. But that is so far from the truth. Satan never stops tempting. He never stops tempting us to sin and he never stopped tempting Jesus to sin. He had broken up the family of God in the garden and he wanted it to stay broken. So, Satan dogged Jesus throughout his entire ministry. How about the Pharisees who continually challenged the authority of Jesus? How about Peter who in one breath confessed Jesus as the Christ, but in the next breath tried to stop him from going to Jerusalem to die? Or, how about that first Palm Sunday when Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the people were ready to make him king? Satan was very much at work behind the scenes but no place were his temptations more apparent than at Jesus’ death on the cross.

Remember, Satan attacks his victims at their weakest point and where do we find Jesus at his weakest? At the cross. While in unimaginable pain and agony, while dying and laboring for every breath, Satan continued his temptation. And with cruel irony, he uses as his tempters the very ones Jesus came to save: the people of Israel.Think back to the scene at the cross and the crowds yelling and shouting at our crucified Lord. *“Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God.” “He saved other, let him save himself.” “He trusts in God. Let God save him.”* Do you not think Jesus was tempted to come down from the cross? Do you not think he was tempted to end the pain and suffering? Scripture tells us he was tempted in every way that you and I are tempted and I can tell you with all honesty, I would have wanted to come down from that cross.

Yet, to the end our Lord remained the faithful Son and did not yield to temptation, even in the face of death. And as the cries, the jeering and the mocking of his tempters rang in his ears, he proved himself to be the true Son of God in his words from the cross, *“Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* Satan threw everything he had at Jesus, including death, and Jesus never gave in. With his death, the threat of Satan’s temptations ended.

Why did he do it? Why did Jesus resist the devil? He did it for us. He did it because we couldn’t. He did it because in order to enter into the presence of God, perfect obedience is required and on our own we would all be lost. Every one of us to the person has failed to resist the devil. Far too many times the devil as tempted us to doubt God’s word and we have done just that. Far too many times we know what God’s word clearly says and yet, with those four little words, *“Did God really say,”* we choose to ignore him doing what we want to do because we want to do it. . .ignore his commands to honor the Sabbath, ignore his command to speak truthfully, ignore his commands to live as the faithful people of God. And each time we yield to Satan’s temptation we show ourselves to be not the faithful children of God, but the faithless children of God. When it comes to caving into temptation, we are a chip of the old block. We are truly Adam’s children. But, what the first Adam could not do, Jesus, the second Adam did. He did for August today in the waters of baptism what Adam could not do . . . again, no pun intended. What you and I could not do, Jesus did for us. And now, in Christ who has done it all, God credits us with being faithful. This is the good news of the Gospel and this is the Gospel that was given to August just minutes ago. In those holy waters God drowned the Old Adam that was in August and put on him the righteousness of Christ. God the Father wanted August to be part of the family and he sent Jesus to bring him into the fold just as he did us all.

Satan took his best shot at Jesus but lost. Jesus was faithful for all the times we have been faithless. He was perfect for all those times we have been less than perfect. He was sinless for all those times we have sinned. Satan had his way for far too long, toying with the people of God, but Jesus put a stop to it. Jesus was faithful all the way to the cross because of the grief of his Father in heaven over the loss of his family in the garden. God was grieved when mankind, in essence, ran away from home and he was willing to do anything to have his family back, including giving up his one and only Son. Christ in his perfect life, his perfect death and his perfect resurrection won for you the right to again be part of God’s family. By his blood, you and I have become the children of God, his Sons, whom he loves, in whom he is well pleased. For Christ’s sake, God forgives us and so we are no longer outcasts but instead, he calls us once again his family. In the name of Jesus. Amen.