

**LED BY THE SPIRIT
LUKE 4: 1-13; ROMANS 10:8B-13
FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT
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Luke 4: 1-13

4:1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." 4 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.' " 5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." 8 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.' " 9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' 11 and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' " 12 Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' " 13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

When we read about Jesus being tempted in the desert, some of us get concerned that we do not know the scriptures well enough to respond like Jesus did. We may have the scriptures on our I-phones or laptops, but can we really Google the scriptures when we have tough choices to make in life?

According to the Apostle Paul, the Good News is that the Word of God is always near those who believe in Jesus Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, our faith in Christ is sufficient to save us no matter what we face in life. Listen to God's Word from **Romans 10: 8b-13**.

The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);⁹ because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.¹⁰ For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.¹¹ The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.'¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.¹³ For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let us pray. Gracious Lord, we give you thanks for your Living Word in Jesus Christ. We give you thanks for the Holy Spirit who is always near to guide, direct and comfort us. Lord, as we move through Lent, help us to turn away from poor choices that tempt us. Give us the wisdom and courage to do what we know in our hearts is right, by the power of the Spirit. Lead us through Lent so that we celebrate Easter with new life in Christ. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, for you are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

According to the Gospel of Luke, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness shortly after his baptism. The temptations Jesus faced are the same temptations reported in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, but Luke changed the order. First Jesus is tempted to follow Satan so that he can feed the hungry. Next Satan promised to give Jesus power over all the nations in the world. Finally, Satan dared Jesus to jump off the walls of the temple in Jerusalem to prove God would save him.

The temptations were complex. They cut to the core of Christ's ministry. Jesus was baptized and identified as the Son of God, but what did that mean? What did it mean to be the Son of God, the Messiah?

Jews had been arguing about that question for years. They said the Messiah would feed his flock like a shepherd. The Messiah would save them from their oppressors, especially the Romans. The Messiah would have more power and glory than even Moses, Elijah, King David and Daniel. Many Jews believed they knew what the Messiah would be like.

At the time of his testing, Jesus had been baptized; but he had not started his ministry. Jesus grew up in a family of faith. He learned the scriptures at a young age. He went to the temple and to the synagogue. By the power of the Spirit, Jesus knew in his heart what God wanted. The wilderness was a formative spiritual experience for Jesus. The Spirit led him there. The Spirit leads you and me, too.

Jesus quoted verses from Deuteronomy in response to the devil. We may not know the scriptures as well as Jesus did, but the Spirit will guide us to the truth if we listen. Like Jesus, we may be challenged by the same temptations over and over again. The devil always looks for another opportune time.

What temptations do we face? Perhaps they are similar to the temptations of Jesus and involve issues of pride, power and control.

The temptation to feed the hungry is a common one. We all are tempted to fix things in our lives and in the world. Sometimes we get so focused on accomplishing a particular task that we lose track of what is really important in life.

Are we on a tread mill of activity right now? Perhaps we are doing good things – accomplishments that sound good – like feeding the hungry must have sounded good to Jesus. What are we trying to achieve in life right now? Good grades at school? Providing for our families? Doing well at work, at school or at church? Taking care of family members? There is nothing wrong with any of this – but are we doing what God wants us to do?

Friday night I visited with a young man who works in computer forensics, security and programming. He told his mom that his neck seemed to hurt a lot lately. He wonders if the constant multi-tasking and hours in front of the computer are taking their toll. He tries to keep his mind alert for work, but now he wakes up at night with his mind racing like a computer.

Another couple joined the conversation. Their son works to hack the hackers for a large banking corporation. Contrary to public perception, breaches of bank security systems occur fairly often. Their son has flexible hours, but he is on-call 24-7. Usually he works nights when the banks are closed. When a breach is eminent, he sometimes sleeps on the floor in front of his computer. They have cots at his office, but he needs to be ready to respond immediately. He likes the adrenalin rush of his work. His mom wonders what will happen when his first child is born later this year. Sometimes doing good things may get in the way of what God wants for our lives. We always have choices in life, and the Word of God is near to guide us. Lent is a time to reflect on the choices we have made, and the choices we are asked to make right now.

The second temptation Jesus faced is a familiar one – it is about power. We all want power. Satan promised Jesus power over all the nations, but the world’s understanding of power was not God’s will. It rarely is. Jesus said that we are to worship and serve only God. Who are we serving with the power we have? Lent is a good time to reflect upon our power and what we are choosing to do with it.

Some of us struggle with issues of power, including the power to control our bodies. We may eat too much or too little. Some of us exercise too much or too little. Some of us may be more concerned about controlling others than we are in controlling our own behavior. Some of us concentrate on exerting power over finances, work, school or relationships. Are we seeking power for the right reasons? Are we following the will of God?

Some of us have illusions about power. We think we have more power than we do. All the money, accomplishments and power in the world will not keep us alive forever. Lent is a time when we are invited to reflect on reality, including the reality of death.

Jesus was obedient to God, even unto his death. Jesus chose not to use power as the world used it. Jesus gave all authority to God. “Not my will, but your will be done,” Jesus said the night of his arrest. Do we recognize God as the ultimate power in our lives? Are we seeking power today for ourselves or for God’s will?

Are we making the right choices? We will know in our hearts what is right. According to the Apostle Paul, God’s Word is near those who believe. Lent is a time when we are called to face our temptations and listen to God. The Spirit is with us. Do we have the courage to follow the Spirit into a wilderness of reflection about how we obtain and use power?

The final temptation Jesus faced was jumping off the walls of the temple in Jerusalem. Satan used our Psalm for this morning as part of the temptation. “After all,” Satan said, “God will send his angels to protect you. God will not let something bad happen to the Son of God.”

Of course, we would not jump off a temple wall. Some people break the laws of society and the laws of nature and gravity, but you and I are not the Joseph Stacks, the Tiger Woods or the Jonathan Edwards of the world. But then again, sometimes we do push the envelope, don’t we? There likely have been times when we drive too fast, take unreasonable risks, and push ourselves further than our bodies can handle. It is not good stewardship, if we believe we are children of God and disciples of Jesus Christ.

At times we probably have tried to control God or at least taken the Lord’s response for granted, which is what Satan tempted Jesus to do. Do we remember instances when we expected God to do what we want, perhaps produce an outcome we desired, cure an illness, help us win a game or accomplish some other achievement. Surely God is on our side.

Some people abandon their church and their faith because God did not do as they expected. “If there were a God,” we hear people say, “this would not have happened.” *Do not put the Lord your God to the test*, Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy. God is God, and we are not.

My friends, Lent is a time when we are called to reflect upon God’s Word and upon our lives. How have we been tempted recently and in the past? What choices have we made? Did we follow the Word of God we knew in our hearts, or did we give into the wisdom of the society in which we live? We need not be like Judas. We have a choice.

The Spirit will lead us into a wilderness of reflection during Lent. Will we go? Maybe we should we fast like Jesus did. Perhaps we should set aside time to read God's Word, pray and listen? There are devotional materials in the narthex. The Word is near us, in our hearts and on our lips. God is calling. I hope we will walk with Jesus towards the cross and Easter.

Ann Weems, in her book Kneeling in Jerusalem (21) observed that "The Walk" through Lent is not an easy one for most of us.

Those of us who walk along this road do so reluctantly. Lent is not our favorite time of year.

We'd rather be more active – planning and scurrying around. All this is too contemplative to suit us. Besides we don't know what to do with piousness and prayer.

Perhaps we're afraid to have time to think, for thoughts come unbidden. Perhaps we're afraid to face our future knowing our past. Give us the courage, O God, to hear your word and to read our living into it. Give us the trust to know we're forgiven, and give us the faith to take up our lives and walk.

May God bless you as the Spirit leads you through Lent.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Let us bring the needs of the church, the people and the world to God's loving care.

Today we will offer what some call a prayer of petition. After I mention a particular category of concerns, please feel free to lift up people's names or a concern aloud or in silence. When no more petitions are made, I will say God, in your mercy and I invite you to join me in saying, "Hear our prayer." Do not worry about saying a name or concern at the same time others are speaking, nor do you have to say it too loud. God knows our prayers, but there is something powerful about naming our concerns aloud within the body of Christ.

God of heaven and earth, through Jesus Christ you promise to hear us when we pray to you in his name. We offer our prayers confident in your love and mercy. **Empower the church** throughout the world and strengthen this congregation in its life and witness. Open us to your will and unite us in your truth so that we serve you in one common ministry. Lord, we pray for this church and the church universal. *God in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

We pray for our president, for the rulers of the nations and for leaders everywhere. Move them to set aside their fears, greed, and vain ambitions. Inspire them to strive for peace and justice so that all people may live secure, free from war and injustice. We pray for our leaders. *God in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

Lord we ask your protection of those who serve you in harms way, whether it is close to home or far away. We pray for military personnel, especially Ted Read, and we pray for their families. We pray for our allies, and we pray for our enemies. May your peace prevail. Hear now our prayers for peace and for the peace makers. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Merciful God, we ask for compassion on all who suffer. Support with your love those with incurable and stigmatized diseases, those unjustly imprisoned, those denied dignity, those who live without hope, and those who are homeless or abandoned. We lift up our concerns about those who suffer. We pray for those injured, anxious or grieving

as a result of the plane crash in Austin this week. We pray for victims of violence everywhere. *God in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

Lord we pray for those among us who need your healing touch. Make the sick whole. Give hope to the dying. Comfort those who mourn. Uphold all who suffer in body or mind, not only those we know and love but also those known only to you, that they may know the peace and joy of your supporting care. We lift up the names of those who need your healing touch aloud or in silence. *God in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

Lord we give thanks for those who are blessed to celebrate another year of life this week. We give thanks for our families, our friends and this church. **We pray all these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.**