

Luke 4:1-13

Lent 1C + March 10, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls
In the Wilderness

The Word of the Lord from Luke 4:1-2a: "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil." This is the Word of the Lord.

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

Why is Jesus in the wilderness? Why is the Son of God – the holy, all-powerful, only-begotten, eternal Son of God – hungry, weak and goaded by the devil?

Jesus is there because of Adam. This is part of His undoing the damage of the first Adam back in Paradise. Adam had everything good to eat in the Garden, all by the Lord's gracious hand; and in that garden there was no hunger or any other consequence of sin. But when the devil tempted Adam to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam gave into temptation. He had no excuse: his nature wasn't sinful yet, and he knew better because the Lord Himself had told him to eat of any tree except that one. Under the devil's persuasion, though, Adam ignored the Word of the Lord and ate the forbidden fruit. He sinned, and the consequences were incredibly far-reaching: all of creation was corrupted along with him. When Adam sinned, he broke and doomed the entire universe! He brought the curse of sin and death upon all of his descendants. His unholiness meant that man could no longer be in the presence of God in His glory.

That's why Jesus is in the wilderness. He's doing what Adam should have done, didn't do, as part of undoing what Adam did do. Just as Satan tempted Adam to eat, so he tempts Jesus to eat; but unlike Adam, Jesus refuses. He refuses and He confesses from Deuteronomy 8:3, "Man shall not live by bread alone." But the verse doesn't end there. It says, "man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." So, where Adam ate and rejected God's Word, Jesus goes hungry to live by God's Word. Please note that the temptation for Jesus is far worse than it was for Adam: when Adam was tempted to eat, he wasn't hungry; but Jesus has been fasting for forty days. When Adam was tempted to reject God's provision, he was standing in Paradise; but Jesus has been in the wilderness for a long time. If Adam obeys God, he stays in Paradise. By obeying God, Jesus is headed for the cross.

We keep speaking of Adam first, then Jesus. But don't forget that Jesus is the eternal Son of God. In other words, the creation that Adam has ruined (long before Jesus becomes flesh) is the one that was created through Jesus. In the most costly, "You break it – you buy it" instance possible, Adam breaks and Jesus pays.

It's not just about hunger any more than it was just about fruit in the Garden: Satan promised Adam that he could have more than God had given – by knowing good and evil, he could be like God. By falling for that, Adam ruined the stewardship he had, for the Lord had given him dominion over the earth. Satan also tempts Jesus by showing Him all the kingdoms of the world and saying, "To You I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If You, then, will worship me, it will all be Yours." This, by the way, should teach you that the devil is not just a liar, but a lunatic: he seems to believe he actually is in control and has gifts to give. He believes that he can seduce the Son of God by offering Him more! Jesus responds with Scripture again, this time from Deuteronomy 6: "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve." Unlike Adam, Jesus stays with His Father's Word and plan, even though that Word and plan will mean the shedding of His blood.

There's a third highlighted temptation: Satan takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and says, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning You, to guard You,' and 'On their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike your foot against a stone.'" Once upon a time, the serpent tempted Adam and Eve by promising, "You shall not surely die;" and now he goads the second Adam with the same. But where Adam succumbed, Jesus resists: He surely has come to die – not there and then, but nearby. In fact, He can probably see Golgotha from the pinnacle as He says to Satan, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

That's why Jesus is in the wilderness. He's working to undo what Adam did: He comes to reverse the curse. Adam breaks the Lord's creation, so the Lord becomes flesh to restore it – to restore it by His own suffering and death so that Adam need not surely die.

Jesus isn't just there for Adam, but for Adam's descendants. That would certainly include Israel, God's chosen people of the Old Testament. Israel spent some serious time in the wilderness, between slavery in Egypt and the Promised Land. They spent forty years there, far longer than necessary, because of their disobedience – because they were horrible at resisting temptation. Remember, for instance, that the Lord provided daily bread in the form of manna falling from heaven, along with the occasional meal of quail; but the people grumbled about the "worthless" food that God provided and wished they were still slaves in Egypt with all the perks like melons and cucumbers ... and being worked to death. Remember too that soon after the Lord brought them out of Egypt by His mighty hand, He summoned Moses to the top of Mount Sinai; and so, so quickly down below, the people panicked and demanded a golden calf to worship. Time and time again, rather than trust, they put the Lord to the test; and so many of them fell in the wilderness and never made it to the Promised Land.

The people of Israel had a horrible track record in the wilderness, so Jesus goes into the wilderness on their behalf. Where they complained about God's gift of food and distrusted Him, He denies Himself completely and still trusts His Father perfectly. Where they turned quickly to worshipping a golden calf, Jesus declares, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve." Where they tested God time and time again and died for it, Jesus will not put His Father to the test so that He might die for them. He knows and trusts His Father's will – and His Father's will is that He go to the cross for the redemption of Israel and all the world, that everyone who believes in Him might be saved.

So Jesus is not just in the wilderness for Adam. He's in the wilderness for all of Israel too, doing what they didn't do.

Let's face it: Jesus is in the wilderness for sinners. He's in the wilderness for you. His own sinless flesh is preaching the wages of sin as the hunger and the weakness take a toll on His body. The world around Him is a barren wilderness full of wild beasts and short on shelter. The devil is relentlessly jabbing Him with one temptation after another to abandon His plan. Yet Jesus resists all temptation perfectly. Doesn't waver, doesn't slip, doesn't have to fight to persuade Himself to stay the course and do the right thing. He trusts His Father's will and He endures all the suffering and the temptation, and He doesn't sin.

Don't forget this little observation by C. S. Lewis, by the way: if you want to know what it's like to be really tempted, you must work at resisting it. The one who gives into temptation right away doesn't really know how bad it can get because there's no need for the devil to turn up the heat. The one who resists endures far greater suffering; and if that is so, then no one has endured greater temptation than Jesus in the wilderness.

He is there for you, and this is a good thing, because you're not so good at resisting temptation.

Take food, for instance. Food is a blessing and a gift from God, right? After all, soon we will pray together, "Give us this day our daily bread." But since the devil seeks to corrupt every good gift of God, plenty of temptations come with food. Some may nearly idolize food as they see it as a way to fill a void left by the wages of sin, or they might demonize it to their bodily harm. Many who struggle with

temptations of gluttony blame the food. My friends, I tell you: this time of year, no one likes Thin Mints more than I do. They are delectable whether eaten straight, frozen, or dipped in peanut butter. If you know what I mean, you know that a box can disappear in no time! But if it does, and you are upset that you have so given into temptation, do not blame the cookie – a 40-calorie lump of flour, sugar and chocolate, no matter how delicious, is not responsible. It's your own sinful nature that got outwitted by its desire for a cookie.

If the presence of food brings temptation, so does the lack of it. For instance, if you're hungry at this very moment, you are probably not naturally thinking, "I sure hope that this sermon is longer than usual, because I live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." In reality, you're busy plotting the fastest route to the nearest buffet or waiting to hear an "amen."

Daily bread, of course, includes far more than bread and daily Thin Mints: according to the Small Catechism, it involves everything that you need for this body and life. It includes health, where you'll be tempted to vanity if you're fit and beautiful, tempted to resentment if you're not, or tempted to bitterness if you have a chronic affliction. It includes sexual temptation, in thought, word, deed and onscreen. It includes your possessions, where you're tempted to resent or grow bored with what God has given, to fill spiritual voids with material things, and to covet what your neighbor has – possessions and people.

The temptations regarding daily bread are beyond number. To paraphrase the Small Catechism, temptations abound to be disobedient, unfaithful, lazy, hot-tempered, rude, quarrelsome; to hurt others by words or deeds; to steal, be negligent, not care, waste or do all sorts of harm or damage.

Those temptations are enough to trip you up. Giving into just one of those is enough to make you unholy; which means that just one of those sins makes it necessary for Jesus to be in the wilderness for you, suffering long before His passion. Keep in mind the nature of temptation and sin, because sinners set low expectations. You're likely to think this way: "I was starting to get impatient, but I took a deep breath, quashed the feeling and didn't say anything. I didn't give in." That's good, but the fact that you had to quell the impatience means that it's not good enough: see, if you were truly Christ-like when it came to temptation, you wouldn't have to fight to resist it. Imagine that I've just begun fasting and that my stomach is still full; and you say, "I will tempt you to break your fast by offering you a great big bowl of steamed lima beans." No problem. There is zero risk I'm going to break my fast, because there is nothing in that temptation that I find inviting whatsoever.

Likewise, when Jesus is tempted, there is nothing in those temptations that He finds inviting. It is not because He doesn't like lima beans. It's because, as the sinless Son of God, He has no desire to disobey. If you were likewise holy, resisting temptation wouldn't be a struggle at all. And to top it off, when you do resist some temptation, you usually fall for getting proud about how well you've done!

So far, we've only talked about those daily bread sins, but the devil doesn't stop there. As he tempted Adam and Jesus, so he tempts you to be like God, to assume authority that overrides God's will. This is why you commit so many daily-bread sins: when your weakness isn't responsible, it's your arrogance that tells you that some sin is okay for you, even though the Lord forbids it. In a myriad of ways, you decide to be like God – not just knowing good and evil, but redefining what is good and what is evil.

How offensive to the Lord: whenever you sin, it's either out of weakness or out of arrogance that claims God's authority to determine good and evil. Whenever you justify the sin you've committed or seek to place the blame for your sin on someone else, you're likewise claiming authority that lies only with God alone.

Then there's the third temptation: it's the temptation that no harm will come to you because of sin. With each temptation given into and sin committed, the devil whispers, "You will not surely die." With each sin successfully completed, he dulls your conscience a little bit more and persuades you that God

doesn't care about sin, and sin has no wages. This is a horrible lie and terrible perversion: the fact that sinners live for a while does not mean that God is apathetic, but that He is patient and merciful. The fact that you're still alive doesn't mean that sin has no wages. It means either that the payday hasn't come, or that someone else makes the payment.

Repent, and rejoice in this: someone else makes the payment.

That's why Jesus is in the wilderness, suffering and fasting for forty days while He is tempted by the devil. He's there for you. This is a big part of His active obedience for you. In other words, when He takes away your sin, He also gives: He gives you credit for His perfect obedience, His perfect resistance to temptation. Because you are repentant and forgiven, God doesn't see your track record of giving into temptation: when He looks at you, cloaked in Christ's righteousness, He sees His Son's perfect record because Jesus credits it to you.

That's not all your Savior is up to. This is part of His work as your High Priest. Hebrews 4:15 declares, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." It's an astonishing statement: on the one hand, since you're clothed in Christ's righteousness, you have no excuse for giving into temptation; but in His mercy, Jesus has walked in your shoes – and worse – in the wilderness, so that He might sympathize with your weakness; and because He sympathizes, He goes on to make the sacrifice.

That's the other part of Jesus in the wilderness. He remains holy and perfect so that He might be the holy and perfect sacrifice for your sins. Because you've broken the Law, He pays for your restoration. Because the wages of sin is death, He dies it for you.

Because Jesus was in the wilderness, you are gathered among the people of God. You're gathered here, because Jesus doesn't stay in the wilderness. After bruising the serpent's head for forty days, He emerges from the wilderness and makes His three-year pilgrimage to cross, to grave, to hell and back. Risen again, He joins you here.

The same Jesus has clothed you in His righteousness, credited you with His perfect obedience, in your baptism. The fruits of His time in the wilderness are poured out on you by water and the Word, as is His death and resurrection.

He gathers you to hear His Word, for you do not live by bread alone. Instead, by His Word He forgives your sins, strengthens your faith, fortifies you against temptation and every attack of the evil one. He speaks life into you.

He gathers you here so that you might receive His body and blood, for the forgiveness of sins, for strength of faith and preservation of life. The one who fasted gives you a most holy meal so that you might finally be welcomed into the marriage feast of the Lamb.

That's why Jesus is in the wilderness. That's why He goes to the cross. That's why He rises again, so that He might say to you, "I make you holy, because I forgive you all of your sins."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen