

## Luke 4:1-13

The devil does not play fair. He always stacks the deck in his favor. Here in the wilderness he waited until Jesus was physically weak from not eating before he tempted Him. Forty days going without even a morsel of food. You and I have never done that. But when we haven't eaten for a day or two because of the stomach flu, multiplying that hunger and that weakness many times over, may give us some idea of where Jesus was at.

The devil waited with Jesus, and he waits also with us. He's not going to launch his attack when we are singing "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" with other Christians in the house of the Lord. He will wait until just the right moment. For us, also, it's when we are weak from not eating. Of course you know I'm not speaking about food for the stomach. The antidote to the devil's temptations is not to have a supply of snacks sitting around the house. "*Man shall not live by bread alone,*" says Jesus. The devil knows that we become weak when we are not feeding upon the Word of God. Some of you know that too; but most do not.

A good rule to follow is this: feed your soul as often as you feed your stomach. Do you eat every day? Then be in God's Word daily. Go without food for a week or two and see how weak you become. That's how weak you are before the devil when you go without the Word of God and the Sacrament for that long a time.

But if we really believed that, we'd be in our Bible at least a few minutes every day. We'd have more than just a few in Bible Class and Sunday School. And we'd have many more sitting in the pews. What this should tell us is that the devil has already succeeded with his temptation. Jesus says that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. The devil says: No, that's a bunch of hogwash! You don't need God's Word and Sacrament that much! Now tell me, judging by your own life's pattern, which one do you believe: Jesus or Satan?

The next temptation was atop a high mountain. The devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and said: "*All this will be yours if you worship me.*" That's how the devil operates. "Worship me first," he says, "And then I will give it to you." God works in the way that is directly opposite of this. First He gives to you, and then, in response to what He gives, you worship Him. The devil craves to be worshiped above everything else. God craves to give all that He has to you above everything else. The devil is a liar. He made glorious promises to Adam and Eve in the Garden. But when they took him at his word and ate the fruit, the glory he had promised became misery and death.

Satan tempted Jesus with the glory of this world, and he also tempts us. He would have us worship him, not by falling down on our knees before him, but by seeking that which he offers; seeking first in life, not the things of God, but the riches, wealth, and glory of the world. Here, too, judging by the pattern of our lives, the devil has already succeeded.

The third temptation took place atop the temple. Satan misquoted God's Word against Jesus. He's a master at this. He does this with us. The devil has us believing that we know the Bible better than God does. We think we are able to teach God what He really meant to say about Holy Baptism, and who it's for and not for; about the Lord's Supper, and whether it should be closed to some or open to all; about who goes to heaven and why. We become the ones putting God to the test by doubting the clear passages with regard to all these teachings of Christ.

The Bible is one of Satan's best weapons. By misquoting it, spreading his lies through false teachers, he has led many astray from the truth. Here, too, with this temptation, the devil has already succeeded.

Has the devil succeeded with you? Here's where it gets tricky. You've heard the saying: "*Pride goes before a fall,*" from Proverbs. We dare not have a proud heart when it comes to the devil. He will win every time. If you or I say, "No, Satan has not succeeded with me!" then we've already fallen; we're caught in the devil's trap. But if we admit defeat; if we confess our frailty, our weakness, that Satan succeeds with us surely every single day,

and that we have no hope of standing apart from the grace and strength of God and by His Word alone, then the devil has lost. He's been defeated.

Your victory over the devil and his temptations is not from within you; it's from Christ. Which means it's in your Baptism; it's in the Holy Supper; it's in the Word of the Gospel. Jesus did what no one else could do. He said "No!" to Satan. And after saying No to the devil, Jesus said Yes to the cross. Jesus knew that you and I would give in to temptation. He knew that we would fail miserably. And so He went to Calvary and became weak there for you. He accepted your failures. He took your sins. He exposed Himself to the wrath of God. He was punished for you.

And so God has completely forgiven you. For all the times when the devil succeeded with you, God forgives you. For all your failures, for your weak knees, for doing the wrong thing - for Jesus' sake, you are forgiven. This is not wishful thinking. This is the absolute truth. There is not one of you whose sin is still charged against you. Christ took it all to the cross.

This is good news for you in two ways. God forgives you because of Christ for you on the cross, and you have power, because of Christ in you, to resist the devil's temptations. You do not need to leave here today with weak knees, bowing down to Satan at every turn in your life. You are joined to Christ in Baptism. Tell Satan to get behind you; you belong to Jesus. You have His Word available to you. The devil will not find you to be so weak when you are in Jesus' words faithfully. And you have His Sacrament on the altar for you. When you do fall (which is every day, like I do, for we are not in heaven yet), you can come and receive Christ's body and blood for cleansing, for strength, for renewal.

Jesus didn't just beat the devil; He beat him for you. What this does not mean is that your life will be easy and free of temptation. Just the opposite. If you want to live as a Christian, the devil will never leave you alone; not until you are in heaven.

A board game I played as a boy is the game of Sorry. You move your pieces around the board with the object being to get them safely into your home area. But you were never safe at any point on the board until you reached the safe zone. Another player could, at any time, play a sorry card and put your piece all the way back to start. It was always a relief, therefore, when you moved your piece into the safe zone and out of harm's way.

You and I are not in the safe zone yet. We're still out in the wilderness. Temptations abound. Sin endangers us. Satan plots against us. But look at today's Gospel reading. Where is Jesus? He's in the wilderness. He's here with you. You're not alone. Jesus' Word is in your ears. His Supper is on the altar. He's safe from the devil, and so He comes through Word and through Sacrament to keep you safe....so that one day (and that day is coming) you will move your piece, or rather He will move it, He will move you into the safe zone, and you will be home. Amen.