

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** Luke 4:1-13

<sup>1</sup> Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” <sup>8</sup> Jesus answered him, “It is written,  
‘Worship the Lord your God,  
and serve only him.’”

<sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ and  
‘On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

<sup>12</sup> Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” <sup>13</sup> When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

An eager but somewhat unscrupulous salesman was delivering a bid to an engineering firm. While the man waiting on him stepped away from the desk for a few moments, the salesman noticed a competitor’s bid on the man’s desk, but he couldn’t read the amount of the bid, as there was a juice can on top of the part of the bid that showed the total amount. The temptation was just too big and so he reached over to move the can to see what the competition was bidding. As he lifted the can, his heart sank as he watched thousands of BBs pour from the bottomless can and scatter across the floor.

Ahhh, this is the challenge of temptation. It appeals to our curiosity, desires and our needs. It preys on our vulnerabilities and weaknesses. There’s a popular old saying that goes like this, “The devil made me do it,” but no one can make us give into temptation. We always have the choice to resist or give in to temptation.

Even Jesus was tempted. His temptation experience took place in the desert, and it happened right at the beginning of his ministry. This wasn’t the only time Jesus was tempted. Near the end of his life, during those quiet moments alone in the garden, Jesus struggled between wanting to live, and wanting to do God’s will. Who can blame him? He was an innocent man who was going to be put to death for all of humanity’s sin. That hardly seems fair. But in the end, in spite of what he felt, Jesus was obedient to God’s will. Jesus can empathize with our daily struggle with temptation.

Sometimes what we are tempted to do is not wrong in and of itself. An example of this is the first temptation that the devil put before Jesus. Jesus was in the desert for forty days and during that time he ate nothing. That’s a long time to go without eating. He had to be starving. Near the end of that time, the devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to

become bread.” It would seem that turning stones into bread so he could finally eat something would not have been a bad thing.

But the devil was trying to get Jesus to take a shortcut, to solve Jesus’ immediate problem at the expense of his long-range goals, to seek comfort at the sacrifice of his discipline. Satan often works that way – persuading us to take action, even the right action, for the wrong reason or at the wrong time. The fact that something is not wrong in itself does not mean that it is good for you at a given time. Many people sin by attempting to fulfill legitimate desires outside of God’s will or ahead of his timetable. When a choice needs to be made, we should first ask, ‘Is the Holy Spirit leading me to do this? Or is Satan trying to get me off the track?’” (Life Application Study Bible)

Satan was a sneaky son of a gun. He not only tried to tempt Jesus when he was vulnerable, he also tried to appeal to Jesus’ strength. Satan knew Jesus had power over all things right at his fingertips if he wanted to use it. Satan knew that if he could just get Jesus to give-in it would put an end to Jesus’ mission for God.

“Often we also are tempted not through our weaknesses, but through our strengths. When we give in to Satan, and wrongly use our strengths, we become proud and self-reliant. Trusting in our own powers, we feel little need of God.” To overcome this trap, we need to remember that our strengths are gifts from God and that we are to use our strengths for God’s purposes.

Next we read that Satan tried to strike up a deal with Jesus. As Jesus stood with Satan on a high place and looked out at the world before him, Satan told Jesus that the world belonged to him, not God, and Satan said he would give it all to Jesus if Jesus would just bow before him and worship him.

We all know that God created the world and it belonged to God, not Satan. But Jesus did not argue with Satan’s point, perhaps because he realized that Satan did own a lot of people’s hearts. Satan owns many people’s hearts today, too. But notice that while Jesus did not argue the point with Satan, he also did not validate it by bowing down and worshiping Satan. Satan did not own Jesus’ heart, nor does he own ours.’

Worshiping God keeps us focused on the truth that we are God’s, and that God is whom we follow—not Satan. It reminds us that this life is only temporary, and we are working towards a higher prize. Jesus could have owned the world, and that may have been cool while he was on this earth, but there was a greater prize at stake, not only his eternal life, but ours too. Jesus knew he was going to give his life for our redemption. Jesus would not bow down and worship Satan for the temporary prize, and neither should we.

Kids who can wait for something do better in school. That’s what Walter Mischel proved in an experiment in 1970 with four-year-olds. He would leave one child in a room with a bell and a marshmallow. If the child rang the bell, Mischel would come back, and the child could eat the marshmallow. If the child waited for Mischel to come back on his own, the child could have two marshmallows.

In videos of the experiment, you can see children squirming, kicking, hiding their eyes – desperately trying to exercise self-control so they could wait and get two marshmallows. Their performance varied widely. Some broke down and rang the bell within a minute. Others lasted fifteen minutes.

The children who waited longer went on to get higher SAT scores. They got into better colleges and, on average, achieved more as adults. The children who rang the bell quickest were more likely to become bullies. They received worse teacher and parental evaluations ten years later and were more likely to have drug problems at age thirty-two.

Mischel concluded that children can be taught “that it pays to work toward the future instead of living for instant gratification. Likewise, It pays for us to resist attractive, appealing , temptations and the brief time of personal gratification that we may feel as a result of giving in, because we are living for the future that will provide us with eternal gratification.

With the third temptation that Satan put before Jesus, Satan twisted the meaning of the Psalm he quoted. Psalm 91 was written to celebrate God’s protection of his people, not to prompt them to use God’s power for sensational or foolish displays. If Jesus made the jump and the angels came to his rescue his popularity might have skyrocketed, but that popularity would have been short lived, and Jesus knew that. Jesus told Satan, “No, you must not make senseless experiments with the power of God.” Likewise, we should not put God to the test.

There’s that line in the Lord’s Prayer where we pray, “and lead us not into temptation; but deliver us for evil.” As we pray those words, what is it that we are seeking? Guidance? Wisdom? Or God to save us from making a foolish or selfish mistake?

A person would not jump into the Niagara River above the falls, and then expect that by some miracle God would keep him from being swept over the falls. A man would not put a match to a keg of powder and then expect that God would keep him from being blown to atoms. And yet there are rational men and women, who have—outwardly at least—turned away from evil and given their allegiance to God, who walk in the way of temptation and seem to expect that they will be protected and saved.

To say "Lead us not into temptation is to ask that God will keep us from reading those books, going to those entertainments, meeting those associates, who stir up the evil which in every person's nature, for every soul has its own ladder leading one astray, down a path that separates one from God.

We can lead ourselves, or permit others to lead us, into circumstances where temptation is certain to strike and where sin is almost equally certain to wound us. The thing is to avoid those circumstances.

There is not much use in a person's trying to row when his boat is only a hundred yards above Niagara Falls. When evil passions are once set in motion, they are not easily withdrawn. When the desire for evil is roused within a person's heart through his/her own willfulness and carelessness, that person may not be able to restraint his/her evil desires any more than a person can persuade an enraged, blood-excited tiger not to leap, or induce a hooded cobra not to strike.

We should never put God to the test. I wish I could tell you it is easy to turn away from all temptation, but you already know I can’t. You know that the choice to turn from or to go through with sin caused by temptation needs to be a personal decision that you need to make time and time again. And when we bow to temptation, we may find ourselves living with unfortunate and painful consequences. Just because we are Christians does not let us off the hook from being tempted. Jesus endured temptation so why should we expect anything less?

Until Jesus returns, there will be evil in the world; so, we are going to be tempted to sin. Our best weapon to fight temptation is to strengthen our relationship with our Savior, who understands what it is like to be tempted. The season of Lent calls us into a time of practicing spiritual disciplines like reading the bible, praying, and worshiping God. Spiritual disciplines help our faith to mature and, grow strong and healthy.

Bonding with our family of faith is another weapon we can have in our grasp to help us fight off temptation. Our brothers and sisters know what it is like to face the challenges of temptation. God gave us each other, to be a community of faith, to support and encourage each other face our challenges, including the challenge of temptation.

Without the community even knowing exactly what temptations we are facing, the bond of being an active part of a faith community can be a powerful weapon. The pandemic tested this bond we have with one another, yet many of us have found ways to stay connected. With the weakening of its grip on us, we have the opportunity again to connect in a personal way, re-establishing that personal touch of our relationship. We were created to be in community for a reason.

Temptations will abound. But we can withstand them. There is a greater reward when we turn and walk away from that which tempts us. Yes, there is the ultimate reward of life everlasting in God’s eternal heavenly kingdom; but we also find that we are alive in God’s Kingdom in this lifetime, a kingdom filled with joy and freedom from sin’s consequences.

In the game of baseball, the batter needs to avoid getting three strikes because if he gets three strikes he is out and he does not get to base. The truth is we are all way past the three-strike possibility when it comes to being tempted. In fact, we’ve been facing the pitcher of temptation every day. Jesus did too. Through this story of Jesus’ vulnerability to be tempted, we learn how to avoid getting strikes and instead, get homeruns. We need to check our motivations for what we do. We need to stay focused on God. We need to call on the Holy Spirit for help to resist temptation, and we need to look towards the greater reward rather than temporary gratification. May we all seek to follow Jesus’ example. Amen.