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Today is the first Sunday in Lent, and perhaps we are already rethinking our Lenten resolutions. Regardless of whether we have already failed our Lenten fasting or could not decide on what to do or give up, we must not miss the message of Lent. We received part of the message of Lent on Ash Wednesday, *Remember, O man, that dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return*. We have been reminded of our mortality, that we will eventually die, and ready or not will meet our Savior. We learn the second part of the message of Lent this morning and that message is wrapped up in the words of our Lord Jesus, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*. Lent is not just about fasting and praying, or realizing how attached we are to our creature comforts, or how short our attention spans are regarding self-denial. Lent is all of this and more, Lent teaches us about the meaning of life.

For this reason, on this first Sunday in Lent, we have heard the Gospel lesson of the Temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is a telescoped replay of Israel's wandering in the wilderness. Israel was in the wilderness for forty years between the Exodus from Egypt and the entrance into the promised land. Jesus is in the wilderness for forty days after his baptism and before the start of his earthly ministry. The spot where Jesus' testing and temptation took place is a very tall desert mountain on the west bank of the Jordan River overlooking Jericho, which is where the Jordan empties into the Dead Sea. It is still an impressive sight today, changed only by the Greek monastery and a restaurant which hangs off the side of the mountain. The restaurant is only accessible by cable car. On the opposite side of the valley is Mount Pisgah where Moses died, and where God showed him the promised land.

Just as the Israelites were tempted in the wilderness, so Jesus is tempted by Satan three times. First, Satan appeals to Jesus' hunger, *turn these stones into bread*. To which Jesus says, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*. Then Satan took Him up to Jerusalem, to a pinnacle of the Temple, tempting Him to make a spectacle of Himself, to cast Himself down so that angels might catch Him. Finally, Jesus is tempted with earthly power and glory, if only He would fall down and worship Satan He would be given all the kingdoms of the world. The Israelites were also tempted similarly. God fed

them in the wilderness by raining down on them manna from heaven, and they were instructed to gather only what was needed for the day. They were not allowed to store extra, and when they tried the manna rotted. It was also in the wilderness where God commanded Moses just to speak to the rock that it might provide water for the Israelites, but instead Moses struck the rock and disobeyed God, and for this reason he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. And who can number the many times God commanded the Israelites to be a separate people in the midst of the kingdoms and lands they traveled through? They were commanded over and over as they wandered through the wilderness not to intermarry with their neighbors or worship their neighbor's gods. They were to follow and worship God only and not be like other nations, and yet the power and glory of these other kingdoms proved too much of a temptation for them.

God shows us through these scriptures that the pursuit of pleasure, the admiration of others, power, and glory for their own sakes are empty. These are not life giving but will lead to spiritual death. The very fact that these were the temptations which Satan offered to Jesus should tell us that to seek pleasure, admiration, power and glory by themselves is evil. But Satan knew what he was doing, he tried to appeal to the human nature of Christ. After all, it had worked before on countless mortals, and still does. How many would trade their souls for earthly pleasure, power or glory? How many use religion as a means to an end, to make us feel better about ourselves, or to influence others? These are the greatest temptations we face today. Instead of turning stones into bread we are tempted to gluttony, with everything from find food and drink to drugs and sex. Instead of making a spectacle of ourselves from the pinnacle of the temple, we are roped into social media, and peer pressure, anything for a few moments of fame. And we work ourselves to death pursuing a small piece of the world, a small taste of power and glory.

Our Lord speaks to us this morning, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.* He says in the Gospel of John, *the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.* We have tried to find meaning to life in all the wrong places, and all we had to do was turn to Christ. And we of all people should be the most grateful, for we have the answers to life literally in front of us this morning. The meaning of life is a life lived in Jesus Christ. It is a life washed in the waters of Baptism, sealed with the Chrism of the Holy Spirit, and

nourished with the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, through the bread and wine of Holy Communion. The meaning of life is punctuated by Holy Communion, remembering daily the Life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, conforming our lives to His Life.

Our Sunday lessons for this season invites us to follow Jesus spiritually to Jerusalem to witness the Crucifixion of Jesus. On the way there we will be reminded continually to take up our crosses and follow Jesus, we will be encouraged to die to sin, with the goal that we experience a spiritual renewal this Easter Sunday. In the meantime it is only natural that we do a kind of spiritual “spring cleaning,” getting our priorities in order, removing our bad habits, and everything that distracts us and turns us away from Jesus Christ. Lent reminds us that to discover the true meaning of life, we must return to the source of our Life.