

Luke 4:1-13

It probably isn't surprising to you that Jesus has overcome temptations. After all, we have most likely overcome some temptations as well, and there have been times when the temptation won. However for Jesus, who is God on earth, it must have been quite easy for him to resist the temptations presented to him by the devil.

We assume this because we believe that temptations are simply the urge to do something wrong, the desire to do something that would benefit ourselves, but would violate the laws of God or society. For instance, at one time, before the cash register was computerized, you may have given the cashier a 10 and received change for a 20 and said nothing. Or maybe you've been given the task of collecting money for a project. No one really knows how much you have collected. You are short on cash and would like to keep some of what you have collected. Who would know? Or maybe you said you would do something, you haven't gotten it done, in fact, you haven't even worked on it, and when asked about it, you lie and say that you're stuck and will finish it soon. A lie seems like a good way to save face. We have these sorts of experiences in our lives and call them temptations.

The devil didn't use the temptations of Jesus in our gospel reading to get Jesus to do something wrong; he wanted Jesus to forget who he was so that God's plan for our salvation would not be carried through. The temptations of Jesus went far deeper than disobedience, and were far more dangerous. Something very frightening went on. Let's look at it carefully.

I think you'll remember that God spoke to Jesus at his baptism telling him "You are my beloved Son." Now Jesus is in the wilderness, on the other side of the Jordan, and Satan is saying to him, "If you are the Son of God..." If you are the Son of God. The devil is planting a seed of doubt about Jesus' identity; hoping, in his wilderness ordeal, Jesus will not remember how God addressed him. Satan is very subtle here, not asking Jesus to do something wrong, but getting Jesus to question his identity.

Our identity is important to us, knowing who we are. I have heard of several fathers who have told their children as they were headed out for the evening, "Remember you are a (insert a last name here), and you're expected to live up to that name". Knowing who you are as a child of God is essential to your wholeness and wellbeing. So Satan's primary objective is to get you to forget you are a member of the family of God. And if he can get you to judge other people Satan really can get a hold on you. There was a woman who went to speak to the pastor telling him she had been attending a different church for a while. She said to him that she only saw two real Christians in the other congregation and that pastor wasn't one of them. Where do we get the idea that we can rate a person's Christianity? Maybe because we have a picture in our minds of what a real Christian looks like and compare ourselves and others to that ideal and doing so causes us to doubt. We ask, "Am I a real Christian?" I believe this makes the devil happy that he may have a foothold.

In this text the word "wilderness" may be a symbol for being spiritually lost. Sometimes we don't feel like a child of God, sometimes we don't act it. When this happens, we feel as though we are in a wilderness, not knowing who we are, not knowing where we are, not knowing our direction, it feels like being cut adrift in life. What do we do then? The same thing Jesus did in the wilderness: turn to the scriptures. Oh, but you don't have any scripture verses memorized? Turn to the Bible. You can even find one on your smart phone. If you don't have access, remember what God has

done for you in the past, recall the truths God spoke about sending a messiah. Turn to God.

We are reminded that God's message of grace is always near us from the second lesson we heard this morning from the 10th chapter of Romans. Paul tells us that, "Everyone who calls on the Lord for help will be saved." God accepts everyone who turns to God. Everyone! We have the promise that whoever turns to the Lord will be received, accepted, forgiven, loved.

If you believe that, if you want that, if you want Jesus as your Lord and Savior you are a Christian. Perhaps not always a very faithful Christian. Perhaps not always a strong Christian. Perhaps at times you don't even feel like a Christian. But Christ has called you, enabled you to accept God's claim on your life, you are a Child of God. We may need to be encouraged to step out into the joy and freedom of believing that that's the way it is. You can stop wondering who you are and what you are, and can move forward as God's child in this world.

And maybe it is more important to tell our children who they are and whose they are... instead of telling them remember you are a (insert a last name here), perhaps we should tell them, "Remember you are a child of God, and you are loved into living up to that." Christ claims that we are one of his dearly beloved and he chose us. Us! In order that we might be his.... Forever.

When Martin Luther became depressed, he saw it as a temptation n of Satan and he would cry out, "I am baptized. I am baptized." He needed the assurance of his identity, that he belonged to Jesus. If he were going to carry out the great work God gave him, he needed to be sure that even though his faith might waver, God's all-encompassing love would not. He needed the assurance that he was held, firmly held in that mighty grip of mercy.

When Jesus was wandering in the wilderness the devil tempted him to make food from a stone. He had the power to do so. But at what cost?

Then the devil tempted him to fall down and worship him, Satan. This, the devil implied, would save Jesus from all the agony he would endure in life on earth, Jesus wouldn't have to suffer. And he promised Jesus all the kingdoms on earth if only he would worship himself, Satan. However, those kingdoms Satan promised were not his to give away. Jesus knew that. He also knew that he had come to give people the knowledge of God's identity. He knew he had to show people God's mercy, forgiveness, grace, and eternal life. He would not give that up for a promise of a false kingdom.

When Satan tempted Jesus to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple putting God to the test of saving him, I can't help but think, and this is just my own opinion, that Satan was hoping that God would not rescue Jesus, and he would fall to his death. If Satan couldn't tempt Jesus to give up his vocation, his purpose in life, perhaps he would just die and Satan could be rid of him. But Jesus knew God would protect him, and he would not put God to the test.

There's a good chance that Jesus didn't feel much like the Son of God out there in the wilderness because he was tired and hungry; more like exhausted. But he knew God was with him. We know God is with us as well. It has been said that sometimes God takes everything from us, but never himself. We are God's children, even when we wander the wilderness. God will not forsake or deny us. Jesus has redeemed us. The Holy Spirit comforts and guides us. We are God's children. All glory be to God.