**3/9/25**

**Temptation or Test**

**Vicar Vince Piekarski**

**Luke 4:1-13**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

Good Morning and Welcome to Lent! If you did not happen to hear this very welcome to the Season of Lent just a few short nights ago at our Ash Wednesday Service then I wanted to make sure you heard it today. Now that you have heard it once or twice then I hope that it drives home the very reality that we are in the thick of things for these next 40 days. I mean it is already bad enough that we have managed to lose an hour of sleep somehow because we had to spring forward for this goofy thing called daylight savings time. It also is bad enough that we have begun to realize that clothing does not fit us anymore, or that we have bought stuff that we never wore or don’t even like, but now we can intentionally donate it to those in need at the Branches and the Atlantic City Rescue Mission in our 40 Days – 40 Items Challenge with True Deliverance Praise and Worship Center. It may have been rough no longer drinking soda or eating candy, or adding more prayer time and devotion in these first few days, but now we are getting the hang of it, and I assure you that it will become easier as we push on. Lent is indeed a season where we seem to do a lot of different stuff, where we manage to think differently, and where we especially manage to focus on various things to improve ourselves and our faith as we approach Easter. As I said in my Sermon Wednesday evening, it may be a hard season for some, it may be rewarding for some, and unfortunately it may just be another few days on the calendar for some as well. Regardless, I am extremely hopeful, and even optimistic, that this Season of Lent will bring about changes for each and every single one of us whether it be just slightly, a good bit, or even a great deal. I am hopeful that we will allow Christ to work in our hearts, and in and through us so that we can be impacted, and more importantly, so that we can impact others as well. That is in whatever way, whenever time, and even wherever the place that the Spirit leads us from these pews and this conference call back out there into the wilderness of our streets here in the Villas and beyond this very congregation and community as well.

Ah, did you happen to hear that very subtle but extremely large detail that I happened to slip in there rather passively? That which I am referring to would be “The Spirit leads,” and it happens to be one of the very questions and concerns that we all may have when we begin to explore this very text from our Gospel Reading a little deeper. I assure you that it is actually in verse one, and quite frankly I know that it can be overlooked rather easily. That is of course because some of us already know this all too familiar story that we heard this morning, or quite possibly it just may not even be a detail that we may have initially felt was very relevant. However, I do assure you that it is a detail that we should all consider though, and when we do it may very well have us wondering why in the world the Spirit would lead Jesus into the wilderness in the first place. Let alone why in the world the Spirit would lead Jesus out there right after He returns from the Jordan. You know that experience where the very same Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove at His baptism? To top it all off one may even wonder why in the world the Spirit would allow Jesus to be tempted or tested at all. Then, to drive this little but huge detail home even more so we hear that the Spirit had Jesus out there at his most vulnerable and weakened state following forty days of fasting, as we are even provided with the very detail that Jesus was “famished.” (2)

Now, if we continue to advance here and choose to ponder this scripture even more deeply then, one may be considering why in the world the Spirit felt Jesus needed to enter this proverbial battle ground and deal with this kind of testing at all. Furthermore, we might even question why the Spirit would feel that Jesus had anything to prove to Satan, or anyone of us that would hear this very message as a matter of fact. These are all great things to question, and points to ponder for sure. Some support is definitely tucked in and provided in the very text that we have all heard and read from scripture today. So, I encourage you to push on with me here as we explore things a little more.

Alright, not so fast, let me take this point to slow down and ensure that I still have you along with me on this journey in scripture. Let me give you a few seconds to digest all that I have just laid out there. I know that my excitement and my diving in may be a little too much at times. I also know for certain that I just threw a heck of a lot at you even though we only actually read 13 verses today. However, that is the fun part when we break things down and explore things together. That is why this very Living Word keeps us tied in and invested all too often. It is not solely because we hear or get what we want, but it is because there is realness to it, there are countless details, and there are even human natures of the divine being acted out right in front of us. The Bible is so simple, yet so complex. Thank goodness everything was recorded, and more so, thank goodness that it was translated over the course of years. Quite frankly my brain is just not programmed to read different letters or symbols, and my brain is definitely not programmed to read the opposite way as Hebrew is written from right to left. How about you?

So, as you continue to figure out how you may dive in and explore our faith in so many different and vital ways. If you want to do more in depth studying, and not just hear it from the pulpit on Sundays, then I challenge you in this season of Lent to ask me how I prepare for a sermon. I challenge you to ask what I read or happen to look at. That way you can get some more of that insider knowledge for yourself, and even for anyone that you may happen to encounter or share anything with.

Alright, now that we have paused and allowed ourselves to digest, now that we have reset ourselves a little bit, let’s move on. So, one thing I will admit that I did not realize is that Jesus and Satan actually utilize scripture from other parts of the Bible to respond to one another as they battle it out here. They are not just simply throwing words or daggers at one another, and their responses are very calculated. Now, we of course get the short and concise account here in these 13 verses we heard and read this morning. However, believe it or not, there are outlines for each and every one of us that we can look up and see where each and every statement comes from in our Bibles. To further top things off, and what I particularly happen to find even more interesting, is that Jesus actually “quotes the word of God” (1) where Satan, or “the tempter spins scripture for evil purposes.” (1) Wow, as if I did not already load things up here today, that just spun things in an even different direction from our focus on the Spirit that we initially started with. Now we have advanced to Jesus and Satan playing chess instead of checkers, and Jesus is of course playing at a Master level well beyond what Satan could even imagine, or for that point, even handle. This is why he eventually slinks away in defeat like the coward that he is at the very end of our Gospel Reading today.

Now, I know for certain that I could make an attempt, or even take a swing at summarizing, explaining, and linking some of these key temptations or tests so you can get an idea of what I am talking about. However, this is where I will admit a little defeat, and this is precisely where I choose to tag in the professionals, or the scholar for this. As I have come to realize more and more often that I do not need to have all the answers. So, I am going to share with you the take from Mark W. Oldenburg that comes from my Sundays and Seasons Preaching book. He writes that, “The temptations themselves have considerable later resonance. (By the way this is that Master Level of chess I was speaking of just a few moments ago. For Jesus is not about just that moment like Satan is. This is where we learn that) Jesus refuses to miraculously provide bread for himself but will later do so for the crowds. He refuses the lure of imperial power, greater than that of kingdoms, but at his trial and crucifixion he will claim (and redefine) kingship and send his apostles to preach globally. He refuses to jump off the temple to prove that God will rescue him, but will later court arrest and execution not to avoid the ultimate sacrifice but to be fully obedient to God’s will at the cost of his own life.” (1) I know, I could have never hoped to hit all those key points, and make those comparisons quite like that, and I hope that helped you see things even more in-depth than we have already explored or questioned this morning. The foreshadowing is rather remarkable, and the way that Jesus handles Satan in each scenario is rather impressive. Again, that is that higher level chess playing going on right there where Jesus is, and will always be, more than just a few steps ahead.

We also happen to be reminded that we are in the very similar battle ground each and every day of our lives. Sometimes we are famished just like Jesus was. However, that is not because we are physically hungry or thirsty, but it is because we have not fed on and drank the message of scripture enough. We manage to be more distracted or even more focused on Satan and the lies and temptations offered because we have not focused on our God Talk through Prayer and Devotion. Sometimes we honestly feel as if we are invincible at times because we have had a few good days or weeks, and we have simply forgotten to say thank you and realize that this was because of our Triune God and not anything that we solely did on our own. To further elaborate on all of this, “Today’s text reminds us that our capacity to repent and to resist temptation comes from our relationship with God and the grace of his deliverance rather than from our own strength and initiative.” (6) Yes, I did not forget to throw grace in there folks, because that unconditional gift is forever present for one and for all who exhibit faith and belief.

So, as we close things off here this morning I just have this to leave you with. “Jesus was tested concerning his baptismal vocation as the Son of God. He was obedient to the course upon which he had been set at his baptism by John at the Jordan. Likewise, those (of us) who are his followers are tested concerning their baptismal vocation. Through (our) baptism, we are called to be obedient and to serve the Lord alone. But our faith is tested in the course of our lives, from birth to death. There is comfort in knowing, however, that God remains faithful, even if we fail (Romans 3:3-4; 2 Timothy 2:13).” (8) Jesus was never alone, and neither are we. Thanks be to God for that!

**Amen.**

**References & Study Points**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

 Preaching

 Year C 2025

 March 9th, 2025

 First Sunday in Lent

 And Mark W. Oldenburg’s Commentary From a Scholar

(2) BibleGateway.com

(3) The Four Pages of The Sermon

 Revised and Updated

 A Guide to Biblical Preaching

 Paul Scott Wilson

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 Abingdon Press

(4) WorkingPreacher.org

 First Sunday in Lent

 The justice of God is lived out in acts of mercy, not power

 March 9, 2025

 Commentary on Luke 4:1-13

 Richard W. Swanson

(5) WorkingPreacher.org

 First Sunday in Lent (Year C)

 The problem with the temptation narratives at the beginning of Lent is the reductive

 view of all temptations as garden-variety challenges to individual faith.

 March 10, 2019

 Commentary on Luke 4:1-13

 David Schnasa Jacobsen

(6) WorkingPreacher.org

 First Sunday in Lent

 A human’s life is more than its cravings

 March 6, 2022

 Commentary on Luke 4:1-13

 Jeremy L. Williams

(7) WorkingPreacher.org

 First Sunday in Lent (Year C)

 During Lent the church often focuses on repentance, resisting temptation, and the

 passion of Jesus.

 February 14, 2016

 Commentary on Luke 4:1-13

 Ruth Anne Reese

(8) WorkingPreacher.org

 First Sunday in Lent (Year C)

 Accounts of the Temptation in the Wilderness appear in all three Synoptic Gospels.

 February 21, 2010

 Commentary on Luke 4:1-13

 Arland J. Hultgren

**Luke 4:1-13**

After being filled with the Holy Spirit at his baptism, Jesus is led in the wilderness. Through his responses to the temptations of the devil, he defines what it means to be called “the Son of God.”

1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tested by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over he was famished. 3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” 4 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’ ”

  5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” 8 Jesus answered him, “It is written,

 ‘Worship the Lord your God,

  and serve only him.’ ”

  9 Then the devil led him to Jerusalem and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written,

 ‘He will command his angels concerning you,

  to protect you,’

11 and

 ‘On their hands they will bear you up,

  so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’ ”

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