

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

March 9, 2025 (1st Sunday in Lent, Year C)
Luke 4:1-13

In tough times, we're tempted to lose our faith in God. Edward F. Markquart wrote,

I remember when Old Man Lunde was alive so many years ago. I remember him telling about the Depression in the 1930s, and the dust storms of North Dakota. I remember how Al Lunde was broke and didn't have a dime to his name. He, his wife and kids moved out to the Pacific Northwest. Al's face stuck into my face, as his finger wagged at my eyes, "And where was God in all of that?" he said. Al was STILL MAD at God for what happened to him in the Depression. The years passed, and his wife, Cora, ultimately had a stroke. As she came closer to death, Al was wrestling with loneliness and depression. He was again ANGRY with God, and ME, and again wagged his finger into my face, "How could a GOOD God do something like this to my wife, Cora?"

You might know someone LIKE Old Man Lunde. How nice it would BE if the PRIMARY TEMPTATIONS of life had to do ONLY with LITTLE things, like sneaking a treat from the cookie jar. But the temptations of life ACTUALLY have to do with the GUT issues of life. Like the temptation to NOT BELIEVE IN GOD. The temptation to not BELIEVE that God knows your name. The temptation to not believe that God counts the numbers of hairs on your head. The temptation to not believe that God is watching OVER us and is CLOSE to us. The temptation to NOT BELIEVE that God is GOOD. The temptation to NOT BELIEVE.

Too often, we Christians have focused our energy on all the things we SHOULDN'T DO. But the devil is smarter than that, more INSIDIOUS than that. He's not all that interested in our PETTY sins; he's MORE concerned in what he can DO with them. The devil wants to drive a WEDGE into our relationship with God, and eventually, drive us to despair.

Notice something in this story. Notice how EACH time the devil tries to tempt Jesus, it's not ABOUT the temptations themselves; it's about what they would MEAN. It's about the GUT issues. The devil tries to UNDERCUT Jesus' CONFIDENCE in his relationship with GOD! He tries to ERODE Jesus' conviction that God is ENOUGH, that God's plan, God's WILL, can be TRUSTED. The devil CHALLENGES Jesus to MAKE GOD PROVE that he can be trusted.

You see, temptation isn't just being lured TOWARD something, something you SHOULDN'T DO; temptation is usually an enticement AWAY from something – NAMELY, away from our relationship with GOD. Do you REALLY TRUST God?

In THIS scene, Jesus was tempted by bread, power, and safety. But it COULD have been ANYTHING. It could just as well have been youth, beauty, and wealth. Or confidence, fame, and security. The point ISN'T the SPECIFIC temptations of Jesus, but the NATURE of temptation ITSELF.

On one level, we all experience our OWN INDIVIDUAL temptations, but on ANOTHER level, ALL temptations are the SAME – they try to shift our allegiance, trust, and confidence to some OTHER POWER, something that FALSELY promises EASIER answers and MORE security, and AWAY from GOD.

We all know the expression, "Give it to God and let it go," or for short, "Let go and let God." Temptation is the OPPOSITE of that: "Hold ONTO it and do it YOURSELF." Or WORSE: "Give IN and give it to someone ELSE, who is NOT God, or SOMETHING else." Or EVEN WORSE: "Give UP!"

We may not be tempted to turn stones into bread, but we are CONSTANTLY tempted to do things OURSELVES, to do it OUR way, as if we DON'T NEED God.

WORSHIPPING the DEVIL is no MORE a temptation for us than it was for Jesus, but COMPROMISING our VALUES with the ways of the WORLD is VERY seductive.

NONE of us is likely to put God to the test by leaping from a CLIFF, but we DO TEST God. We say, “God, if you REALLY EXIST, then get me OUT of this.” “God, if you REALLY LOVE me, then DO THIS THING for me.” We turn the PROMISES of God around to try to MANIPULATE God.

This passage isn’t JUST about JESUS’ temptation; it’s about OUR temptations. It isn’t just about the little devil on our shoulder trying to convince us to DO something we SHOULDN’T; it’s REALLY about questioning our FAITH in GOD, doubting whether we really NEED God.

Consider the BARRAGE of advertising we’re subjected to every day. Nine times out of ten, the goal of those ads is to give us a sense of NEED, of LACK, and make us feel INADEQUATE, followed by the implied promise that purchasing the advertised PRODUCT will RELIEVE our insecurity.

Or consider how many of the messages from the media and un-SOCIAL media try to create in us insecurity and fear. Terrorism, immigrants, corporations, joblessness, low wages, high taxes, the wealthy, the poor – depending on who you listen to the target shifts, but the MESSAGE is the SAME: you should be AFRAID, because you DO NOT HAVE ENOUGH, and ARE NOT ENOUGH.

We are under ASSAULT every single day by tempting messages that try to draw our allegiance AWAY from God, the God who created and redeemed us, and toward some MEAGER SUBSTITUTE god.

JESUS sees RIGHT THROUGH the devil’s deceit. With every temptation, he responds, “What’s the purpose for this? WHO does this serve? If it DOESN’T serve the LORD, then I’m not interested.”

And he does it with Scripture. Jesus SHOWS us that our ONLY DEFENSE is God’s Word, and IN the Word, we see the TRUTH. IN God’s word we read that God LOVES us more than ANYTHING, loves ALL of us enough to send his only Son into the world to take on our human NATURE, to suffer the SAME temptations and wants, to be rejected as WE so often feel rejected, and to DIE as WE will die, ALL so that we may know that God is WITH us, and FOR us. And God RAISED Jesus from the DEAD to DEMONSTRATE that God’s LOVE is GREATER than all the HATE in the WORLD, and that the LIFE God OFFERS is more POWERFUL, EVEN than DEATH.

This is why we gather here every week. Tempted, in a multitude of ways, to question that God is GOOD, or even LOSE our FAITH in God altogether, we come to CHURCH. We come to be REMINDED of WHO GOD IS. In the face of so many ASSAULTS on our faith, we come to CHURCH, to have our faith RENEWED AND RESTORED, so that we can live in CONFIDENCE and HOPE, and SHARE God’s love with those around us.

JESUS KNOWS! Jesus knows how POWERFUL the temptation is. He knows how EASY it is to get lost. He’s BEEN there. He’s BEEN in that wilderness. But Jesus WENT to that wilderness INTENTIONALLY, for US, so that he could walk WITH us, and GUIDE us back OUT again.

Our Lord is ENOUGH. And in CHRIST, in your faith and in your baptism, you HAVE enough, you ARE enough, and you are of INFINITE worth in the eyes of God. Life may punch you in the gut sometimes, but DON’T YOU FORGET that you are a child of God, and you are loved. Don’t let anyone, any DEVIL, tell you OTHERWISE. You are LOVED, and you are ENOUGH. No one can EVER take that away from you. Amen.