

1st Sunday in Lent
February 21, 2010
Luke 4:1-13
"Protect Me, Lord"
First Lutheran, Temple

Children's Sermon—Key verse: "When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time" (v. 13).

Have you ever heard stories about the devil? They are usually scary stories, because we know the devil always brings evil things to anyone around him. In fact, "evil" is in his name (devil). I just read a story from the Bible where the devil tried to tempt Jesus to do some things that Jesus knew weren't good for him.

First of all, you must remember that Jesus had just been baptized and he was about to begin his mission of love and salvation for God. But first the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness where Jesus prayed and fasted for 40 days. "Fasting" means he didn't eat any food. People sometimes "fast" to get close to God. Well, Jesus was really hungry, but he kept praying—and it was about then that the devil showed up. He offered Jesus food—a real temptation when you think how hungry Jesus must have been. But Jesus refused to eat anything. Next, the devil told him to go to the highest point around and look at all of the countries and all of the wealth in those countries and think about it all belonging to him—*if* he would only worship the devil. Jesus refused again. Finally, the devil thought about something that would make Jesus very popular with all the people who saw it or heard about it. The devil suggested that he go to

the top of the temple and just dive off, but instead of hitting the ground and dying, the angels would catch him in the air and bring him down safely. This was in the Bible, so the devil knew it would be a tempting idea for Jesus. But again, Jesus refused. Then the devil left him for awhile. But he promised that he would be back.

I wonder where the devil went and what he is doing now. Have you seen the devil today? Sometimes the devil hides in unusual places—like pockets. Is the devil in your pocket? No...he isn't in any pockets. Well, maybe the devil is one of our empty pews here... Hmm...I don't see him hiding in a pew. Hey, how about this trash can. There can be some nasty stuff in the trash—that might be a good place for the devil to hide—what do you think? Nope—not there.

Where do you think the devil likes to hide? He likes to hide in people's hearts—where Jesus belongs! He likes to hide there and get us in all kinds of trouble. I'm sure the devil is not in any of our hearts today, but he's pretty sneaky. I like to say a prayer in Jesus' name to make sure the devil stays away with all his evil temptations. And I'd like to teach you to say the prayer and encourage you to pray it every day.

Let's pray. Dear Lord Jesus, protect me from the devil and all his evil ways. Amen.

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Please turn to page 86 at the front of the worship book, and find the prayer toward the bottom of the page entitled "Protection through Life".

Let us pray. O God, full of compassion, we commit and commend ourselves to you, in whom we live and move and have our being. Be the goal of our pilgrimage, and our rest by the way. Give us refuge from the turmoil of worldly distractions beneath the shadow of your wings. Let our hearts, so often a sea of restless waves, find peace in you, O God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As the children have reminded us, the devil is a crafty fellow. He likes to hide nearby, very subtle and cunning, always waiting for any chance to overcome the goodness of God.

Today we heard the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. He was preparing for the mission God had given him—a mission to save the world from sin, death, and the devil. As he fasted and prayed there in the wilderness, the devil showed up, trying to lure Jesus away from his primary purpose of redeeming the world.

When we think of temptations, we often think of the bad things, things that cause us harm, things that obviously lure us away from the path of God: things like greed, anger, evil intentions; and things that harm our bodies, like too much rich food, alcohol and drugs. Maybe some of you remember the old TV sketch that always ended, "The devil made me do it!" But when the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness, the devil used very *good* things for his tempting enticements. First, because of Jesus' extreme hunger from his fasting, the devil tempted him with food—not rich and enticing foods, but the most common and simple staff of life: bread. Jesus recalled the time in another wilderness, when the people who had followed Moses were hungry—and then God had provided manna. But they were not satisfied: they wanted

the rich variety of food they had left behind in Egypt: leeks and onions and cucumbers... They whined and complained. They neglected Moses' reminder that God had promised them a land flowing with milk and honey, if only they would wait. Jesus knew he must wait: "One does not live by bread alone..." Jesus focused on the mission of redemption God had intended for him—he knew he must wait.

Second, the devil tempted Jesus with power and authority. Jesus' people lived in a very evil and destructive time, and when the devil showed Jesus all the nations of the world—even the evil Roman Empire that had brought so much pain to his people—and offered Jesus authority over them, Jesus could imagine his rule of peace and justice and honor, and how it could improve the lives of his beloved friends. He could be like King David and bring power and peace to Israel once again! But Jesus knew—that kind of peace would not last. His mission was to bring hope and redemption to ALL people for ALL time. He knew he must wait. "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him..."

Finally, the devil tempted Jesus with his most devious plan. "Jump from this tall place, Jesus—God will rescue you—God promised *in scripture* that God will not let any harm come to those who love him. God will send angels to protect you." The devil tempted Jesus to prove God's faithfulness to him, to put God to the test.

Of course, we know how the story ends: Jesus is the Son of God and resisted all the devil's temptations. But the devil came back again—and he really thought he had won the battle over Jesus when he watched Jesus die on the cross three years later. But Jesus won that battle when, after

wrestling with the devil in hell for 3 days, he rose victorious from the grave of death. He won the battle *for us*.

Jesus has won the battle over sin, death, and the devil *for us*. That resurrection victory gives us hope for eternity. However, until Jesus comes again, we wait and we wrestle with the devil every day. He is still very cunning, and he hides in unusual places to catch us off-guard. We find ourselves tempted by the every-day enticements that keep us from having healthy bodies and strong minds. We find ourselves tempted to berate others to make ourselves look better; we even bash our elected leaders, our teachers and bosses, our co-workers and friends. Our words and actions toward others tell a great deal about our love and service to God. Finally, the devil tempted Jesus with the greatest temptation of all: testing God. Well, we don't do that, do we? I think we do... Have you ever made a "deal" with God? "God, if you really care about me, you'll let me get the promotion I want..." "God, if you love me, you will heal me from this affliction..." "God, if only you will give me what I want, I will follow you faithfully..."

Temptations abound, and even good things can tempt us away from a steady and faithful life with God. Martin Luther said that temptations are like "birds that fly over our heads—and there are many birds flying overhead! We can't stop them from flying over us," Luther said, "but we can prevent them from building a nest in our hair." God is always faithful. He sent his Son to die on the cross for us. And that is the reason we can keep flapping birds of temptation away from our hair! Jesus takes our sins, our temptations, our griefs from us, and leaves us clean and forgiven, ready for each new day to do battle with those crazy birds! One day,

he will call us home to live in the peace and perfection of eternity. I trust that that day will be a great day!

For now, we live in a wilderness of temptations, mistakes, and sin. But despite all our mistakes, we live in the promise of God's wonderful grace won for us by Jesus. We are forgiven! We are protected by a God who loves us! We are saved for all eternity! Praise the Lord! Amen.