

First Sunday in Lent
Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish
Saint Francisville, LA
Luke 4:1-13

- "Lead us not into temptation."
- These are words taught to us by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ - that every day, members of his Body throughout the world - boldly pray.
- "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."
- Lead us not into temptation.
- Temptation
- In English, the word means not only being drawn or enticed to do something, but being drawn to do something we shouldn't do - to actively sin, or, perhaps passively allow evil to corrupt our lives and relationships.
- To be tempted is to be lured away from following God's ways - to plug our ears, harden our hearts, and stop listening to the Lord - to stop obeying his word.
- So indeed, keep us from that - O Lord - lead us not into temptation!
- And yet - in contrast to these negative connotations, the same Greek word for being "tempted" can also have a more positive meaning - that is, to "test" or "try" something - put it to the proof - examine it - in the sense of testing a precious metal or ore to determine its quality and composition - for example, exposing it to high heat and seeing how it reacts.
- "To test" in this sense means to see what something is made of - how it stands up to the heat.
- And we use this kind of language for people, too - and ourselves. "Let's see how she stands up under fire" - "how will you react when the going gets tough?" - or "perform under pressure?" - "Try me - I'll show you what I'm made of."

- In our gospel passage for today, we hear about how - Jesus, after his baptism, was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.
- The Spirit leads Jesus in the Wilderness - *in order to be tempted* - tempted- not, to be sure, by God, but by the devil.
- But why?
- I believe the double meaning is at play here - Jesus was tempted, yes, but he was also tested.
- Tested - in the sense of revealing his nature and character - *by* the temptation - or, more specifically, by the way he resisted temptation - how he stood up under pressure to the assaults and enticements of the devil.

- After his baptism, Jesus embarks upon his course of public ministry - a series of stories and events which reveal something of his identity *to* and *for* the world - showing us more and more about who he is - what kind of Messiah he is going to be - and, ultimately, what it means for him to be the Son of God.
- At his baptism, we know, heaven was opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove. And a voice called out, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" - clear as day, there it is - a voice from heaven that calls him "my Son."
- Right after that - he is led in the wilderness - and we get our first glimpse at what he's made of - what being the Son of God means. Forty days with no food - famished - and the devil is testing him. "If you *really* are the Son of God, the one through whom all things were made - prove it - turn this rock into bread."
- Luke's description is brief, but we can imagine the devil didn't just leave it at that - he had 40 days to work on him - "Hey Jesus, I saw your buddy John the Baptist out there by the river boasting that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Surely you can make this one into a measly piece of bread. Can't you turn water into wine? Multiply loaves to feed the hungry masses. Why don't you use that divine power now to feed someone who's hungry? I mean, you must be starving! If you really are the Son of God, you've got a big job ahead of you - you need to keep your strength up. Go ahead. Give up this fast. Have something to eat."
- Jesus responds with a short quotation of scripture, one that comes a longer passage in Deuteronomy that reads:
 - Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart... He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna ... in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord (Deut 8:2-4).
- So, when Jesus - responds to the devil's test - "one does not live by bread alone" - he is also revealing more
 - Showing the relation of his identity as the Son of God to the story of Israel
- And how he will recapitulate Israel's wilderness trials - reiterate - or, in a sense, repeat, fulfill, and perfect them - this time without faltering.
- Failing in his first attempt, the devil tries a different tact - in the first test, he tried to tempt Jesus to use his divine power over nature. In the second, he'll tempt Jesus to take political and military power over humans.
- He shows him all the kingdoms of the world - and says, "Bow down, worship me and voila - its yours! Quick and painless - none of that long suffering nonsense."
- "Look, Jesus, you're a good guy - think of all the great things you could do - imagine how much better the world would be with you in charge! You could make creation great again! Restore that lost paradise."
- But Jesus again responds with scripture- "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

- The devil's last test is perhaps the most clever - First, he tempted Jesus to use control over nature - then, he tempted him to take control over nations - now, he will tempt him, in a sense, to control God himself - to force God's hand and compel him to act.
- And this is the clever part - seeing Jesus' reliance on scripture, the devil responds with his own biblical citation - taking Jesus up to the pinnacle of the temple - and again, challenging him and his claim to divine Sonship, "if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here" - and he supports the idea by quoting from our Psalm for today - "for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"
- In other words, the devil is saying - "if you really are the Son of God, whom he loves so much, and with whom he is so pleased - surely he wouldn't let anything bad happen to you - the scriptures say he'll send angels to protect you - And you believe the bible, don't you? God said it, you believe it, that settles it, right? So take this leap of faith - go ahead and jump - angels will be there to catch you, that's what he promised."
 - Take note, my friends. The devil can proof text scripture better than the best charlatans and frauds.
- Yet, Jesus' response is not to abandon his foundation - worried that he no longer has any basis to evaluate the veracity of one passage against another - or that the authority of scripture is compromised. Rather, he remains firmly rooted in the word and he delves deeper, showing us how to answer scripture with scripture.
- He draws again from Deuteronomy, "do not put the Lord God to the test" - which is a reference to the story of the Israelites at Massah, in the desert, when they quarreled with Moses and tested the Lord - compelling him to bring water from a rock, questioning, "is the lord among us or not?" "You've brought us out here to die! We're thirsty! Give us something to drink! Is the Lord with us or not?"
- Essentially, the devil is tempting Jesus to do the same - "Is the Lord with you or not? Are you really the Son of God? If you are, take this leap of faith and watch the angels catch you."
- Jesus knows the history of the people Israel, and he knows the command with which he rebuts the devil: "do not put the Lord your God to the test."
- Finished with these tests, we are told, the devil departs from Jesus until an opportune time.

- Now, what are we to make of all this? How do we see ourselves in the story - or how the tale might relate to our lives?
- If this is supposed to be a story about seeing what it means to be the Son of God - what has that to do with us?
 - In between the story of his baptism and his being led into wilderness, Luke does a curious thing - inserting the genealogy of Jesus.

- We don't often pay attention to genealogies in the Bible. So and so begat so and so who begat so and so. But here, I think the genealogy is important. Unlike the genealogy in Matthew - which begins with Abraham and moves *forward* to Jesus, in Luke, it begins with Jesus and goes *back* - Jesus, son (as was thought) of Joseph son of Heli, son of Matthat.... back and back, not stopping with Abraham - but all the way back to very beginning.
- The last verse before our passage for today reads: "...son of Enos, son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God"
- Adam, son of God
- And in today's story, here is Jesus showing us what it means to be the Son of God.
- Being tempted with the lure of control - over nature, nations, divine action.
- It's the temptation to not accept our human limitations
- That is the original sin - succumbing to the temptation - the devils lie - that disobeying - trespassing limits set for us - we can become like God.
- And here is God come to be like us in every way but without sin -
- Re-capitulating - not only the story of Israel, as we have seen, but also that of humanity.
- What it means to be the son of God is the giving of self for the perfection of humanity.
- And by our baptism - we share in his self-offering.
- We are adopted as children of God - becoming sons and daughters of God.
- Now, as the Israelites were led into the wilderness after passing through the red sea - and Jesus - after his baptism in the Jordan - so too - we - who are baptized into Christ - go with him into the wilderness - we face trials and temptations - but also - he goes with us, he is with us in the wilderness.
- And Jesus shows us the model for how to deal with temptation - the pattern we are to imitate, always returning to the word - which is ever near to us, on our lips and in our hearts.
- The season of Lent is a time for self-examination - looking at our lives and re-evaluating our priorities. Lent is often said to be a kind of training - a time of added self discipline and preparation - looking forward to the great Easter celebration, but also preparing ourselves to better hear and discern God's call to us, to better stand up to the trials and temptations that may come our way.
- But Lent is also about exposing our human limitations - seeing what we're made of - and realizing we might not be as strong as we think.
- I used to wrestle in high school. And I used to think I was pretty tough - Hey, I was the district champion of Spotsylvania County. I used to laugh at the kids who would "tap out" or give up in a match. And I say, "I'd never do that!" So, I go to this wrestling camp run by a guy named Kenny Chertow. And Kenny was a little guy -

only coming up to my shoulders, probably only weighed 130 pounds. And there I was, thinking I was really something special, I challenged Kenny to a match. This was the era before you could google someone and find out their stats. So, I didn't know that he was a three time NCAA All-American, a Junior National Champ, Pan-American Champ and wrestled in the 1988 olympics. I go out there and the next thing you know, I'm flying through the air - then twisted up on the ground like a pretzel - and I'm howling out, "I give up! I give up!" But he pretended like he didn't hear me - and the next thing you know, I'm screaming like a little child.

- I learned a lot from that experience - I learned that I wasn't nearly so tough as I had thought.
- Lent is about exposing our weaknesses and our human limitations - seeing what we're made of -
- In the psalm for our Ash Wednesday service, we said, "As a father cares for his children, so does the Lord care for those who fear him. For he himself knows whereof we are made; he remembers that we are but dust" (103:13-14).
- And indeed, Lent is about remembering that you are dust - not just putting it on your forehead.
- Giving up something for lent - is not to make us spiritually proud - or to make us miserable (as if that were somehow pleasing to God). It is to remind us of how weak we truly are - to remember and accept our human limitations.
 - I sometimes like to think about what I would do if I were put in the same kind of extreme situations as Christians in the early church - if I had to face the same kind of trials. And I'd like to think that if someone put me to the test and forced me to choose - my faith or my life - I'd gladly give up my life.
 - But, it is during Lent that I reminded - I have a hard time giving up brownies!
 - Who am I to think that I have the strength or the will to do such a thing on my own? I am weak.
- But, when we made aware of our weaknesses and remain cognizant of our limitations
 - we are also enabled to truly appreciate when the hand of God is at work in our lives
 - when it is he who is at work in us and not ourselves - when we are being truly supported and sustained by his grace, and not by our own merits.
- And that it is only by God's gracious gift that we are given everlasting life. Amen.