

## Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. <sup>2</sup>After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup>The Tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread.”

<sup>4</sup>But Jesus answered, “It is written:

Man shall not live by bread alone,

but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God.”

<sup>5</sup>Then the Devil took him into the holy city. He placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup>and he said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written:

He will command his angels concerning you.

And they will lift you up in their hands,

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

<sup>7</sup>Jesus said to him, “Again, it is written:

You shall not test the Lord your God.”

<sup>8</sup>Again the Devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup>He said to him, “I will give you all of these things, if you will bow down and worship me.”

<sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

<sup>11</sup>Then the Devil left him, and just then angels came and served him.

## One Little Word

### I.

It was seven weeks ago in our church year. That was the day we celebrated the Baptism of our Lord Jesus in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. We watched in awe as the Holy Spirit descended from the heavens in the form of a dove. Our ears rang with the words spoken by the voice from heaven: “This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him” (Matthew 3:17, EHV).

That was the day. That was the Day that God the Father and God the Holy Spirit officially anointed Jesus into his office to be our Savior. From the moment of his conception in the womb of Mary, Jesus had already begun his earthly work as our Savior from sin, but his baptism was the official beginning of that special ministry. The next week, we heard John the Baptist pointing to Jesus the day after the event of his baptism and declaring: ““Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, EHV).

It wasn't long after Jesus' baptism that Matthew declares: “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil” (Matthew 4:1, EHV). Luke tells us in his account of the same event: “He was tempted by the Devil for forty days” (Luke 4:2, EHV). The whole time Jesus was out there in the wilderness, Satan was tempting him.

It was near the end of the 40 days of temptation, during which Jesus had not eaten anything, that Satan began the three temptations today's Gospel specifically talks about. He began his temptation: “If you are the Son of God...” (Matthew 4:3, EHV).

The voice from heaven had just declared Jesus to be the Son of God days earlier. Even before that declaration by the Heavenly Father, Jesus had a firm grasp on who he was. Even as a young boy visiting the temple he had told Mary and Joseph that he had to be about the task of doing the Heavenly Father's work.

With his temptations, Satan was attempting to do the same thing he did with Adam and Eve in today's First Reading, right before the first sin—he was using a little snippet of God's Word—a little snippet of truth—to lie. One little sin; one little misstep on the part of Jesus, and Satan would win the whole game. That's all our fate is to him—a game. He wants as many of us as possible to join him in hell. One mistake on the part of Jesus and *all* of us would have been doomed to join him there.

Naturally, Satan chose what might seem to be a weak spot. Jesus hadn't eaten in more than five weeks; he was surely starving. “The Tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread’” (Matthew 4:3, EHV).

If you really *are* the Son of God, shouldn't things look a little different? Take care of yourself. Deal with your growling, empty stomach. The temptation was to be the disobedient Son. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit had *wanted* Jesus out there in the wilderness facing the temptations. Satan wanted him to disobey.

"Then the Devil took him into the holy city. He placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup>and he said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you. And they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone'" (Matthew 4:5-6, EHV). If you won't be the disobedient Son, Jesus, be the presumptuous Son. God *says* he will take care of his people—even that he will send angels. Since that is the case, presume that he will take care of you even when you are being reckless and irresponsible.

"Again the Devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup>He said to him, 'I will give you all of these things, if you will bow down and worship me'" (Matthew 4:8-9, EHV). If you won't be disobedient and you won't be recklessly presumptuous, then be disloyal. Don't follow your Heavenly Father. *I*, Satan, can give you all kinds of power if you will just worship me.

## II.

Remember how Satan started his temptations? "If you are the Son of God..." (Matthew 4:3, EHV). He went for doubt. He suggested a lack of self-esteem.

Satan uses the same tactic with Christians. If you are really children of God, shouldn't things be going better?

As soon as he poses the question to you, you begin to take a look at your life and see all the things that you would like to be better. There are your retirement funds. Maybe you don't have any of those at all. For those who do, the balances don't look as healthy today as they did two years ago. Then you look at inflation and your income. It just hasn't kept pace, and there are times that you struggle to do the same things you were able to do not so very long ago. If you were really a child of God, would he let things get this bad in your life?

If I'm really a child of God, why am I hungry? Why do I get sick? Why do I have to face the same temptations day after day after day?

Perhaps you begin even to question the existence of God. If he were really "out there," and he really cared about people, would he let all the bad things happen that happen every day? If God is really out there—if God is really with us—why do we have all these hardships? Why isn't life easier?

## III.

All alone, out there in the wilderness with an empty stomach, these are the kinds of temptations Jesus faced. But you know what? He faced them to a much greater degree than we ever have or ever will.

You see, we give in...eventually. Sometimes it doesn't take very long. We at least begin to think about how things might be if we were in charge. Satan gets us the same way he got Adam and Eve: "You will be like God" (Genesis 3:5, EHV). Maybe we don't think we will be like God the same way they did, thinking we will know good from evil, but we think that we will be like God in that we will be in control of our own destiny.

Jesus' attention span didn't wander that way. He didn't follow Satan's lies. "But Jesus answered, 'It is written...' <sup>7</sup> 'Again, it is written...' <sup>10</sup> 'For it is written...'" (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10, EHV). In our Hymn of the Day, Luther wrote the famous line: "One little word can fell him." Over and over and over again Jesus used one little word from Scripture. Even when Satan attempted to use that very thing against him and point to Scripture, Jesus used the Word of God to counter the attacks.

Even before the temptations listed in today's Gospel, the attacks of Satan had come at Jesus hot and heavy. Jesus had willingly gone out into the wilderness to face these temptations because he knew this was all part of the way he would serve as our substitute.

As the one little word defenses continued, Satan must have grown more and more desperate. Satan knew what Jesus knew: Jesus had to resist flawlessly. Not just these 40 days, but from the moment he had been conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. He had to resist every day of his 33-year life so he could present himself as the Lamb of God without blemish or spot to be the perfect

sacrifice needed for the sins of the world.

When Satan offered what on the surface were designed to look like shortcuts, Jesus didn't succumb, because he already knew who he is. He didn't have an identity crisis. He didn't have any self-esteem problems. He knew that God the Father wanted him to carry out the work of salvation for each one of us.

Jesus achieved what we need. He was obedient to God. He perfectly fulfilled what the Heavenly Father had said as he was anointed as our Savior at his baptism: "This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him" (Matthew 3:17, EHV).

"Then the Devil left him, and just then angels came and served him" (Matthew 4:11, EHV). His temptations weren't over. Satan would continue trying in desperate move after desperate move, but Jesus would remain steadfast in his desire to complete salvation for us. For now, Satan gave up to watch for another time when Jesus might be at a weak point.

#### IV.

Paul reminded us in today's Second Reading: "Through the disobedience of one man the many became sinners" (Romans 5:19, EHV). Sin got passed down from generation to generation. Adam and Eve caved in to Satan's lies. Other than Jesus, everyone born into this world since then has inherited sin. Every one of us caves in to Satan's lies on a regular basis. He lies, and we believe it. We turn away from God and follow him—sometimes *thinking* that we are choosing our own path, but we're really choosing Satan's path.

So how can we deal with Satan's lies? Back to Luther's hymn: "One little word can fell him." Our little word is Jesus. Jesus already took that sin, Satan. Jesus already dealt with what you are lying about. Point to Jesus.

Just as Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, we are baptized, too. Faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit. There is no one who can ask for faith. Jesus said: "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16, EHV). That applies to everyone who believes in Jesus. He chooses us by the gift of faith the Holy Spirit gives. That's why even our little children are baptized; who would want to refuse that gift of God to little children?

But the second the parents carry that little child through the double doors of the sanctuary into the narthex, and then through the double doors outside to the parking lot and the world beyond, Satan does his best to attack the faith of that child, just as he attacked Jesus in the wilderness. Just as he attacks the faith of every believer of every age.

One little word. That's what every believer needs, from childhood to old age. One little word of God that can be used to fell Satan.

That one little word stays in the heart by bringing that child to Sunday School. The one little word stays by sending that child to Holy Trinity school. That one little word is the whole reason we operate a school. It isn't cheap. There are times when the budget is behind and we face difficult choices as a congregation. But we at Holy Trinity prioritize the strengthening of the faith of little children, so the one little word can grow and grow in them, and equip them with the armament they need to do battle with Satan outside these double doors.

Will your children complain sometimes when they have to do extra memory work to prepare for religion classes and catechism classes? Probably. Will they resist your wishes to make sure they come to church on a regular basis to get the strengthening they need of the one little word in church? Quite likely. After all, the Sinful Nature inside every person is always there; Satan is always twisting things to make unbelief seem as palatable as possible. Keep bringing your children—and yourself—back for more, anyway. Get your littlest ones to the Family Time with Jesus that will begin on April 23 at 11:30. Every reinforcement of the one little word is something that prepares them—and you—to continue your own personal battle against Satan.

And as the angels came and attended Jesus, they are always with you, too. As you go out those doors later today, remember your baptism. Jesus already won the battle for you, and he gives you the one little word you need to be your strength against temptation. Use the one little word. Stay in the one little word. Grow in the one little word. Every year. Every week. Every day. Amen.