

Our Lenten Journey

The Holy Gospel reading for the 1st Sunday in Lent, March 1st, is the account of the temptation of Jesus, Matthew 4:1-11. Immediately after Jesus was baptized, He was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. The desert was a place associated with demons, so it is no surprise that the devil attempted, without success, to derail God's plan by tempting Jesus to fall into temptation. What is a surprise is that Matthew reports that Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights. Afterwards, He was hungry. Who wouldn't be hungry?

Jesus resisted the devil's temptations by speaking the Word of God. In the 3rd and final temptation Jesus told the devil: "get out of here!" He again quoted God's Word.

Our Lenten journey lasts for forty days---from Ash Wednesday to Easter, the Resurrection of our Lord. There are several take-aways from the narrative of the temptation of Jesus.

First of all, Jesus fasted for forty days. God had also led Israel into the wilderness to wander for forty years. Israel had experienced great hunger in the wilderness. Recall how the whole congregation "murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness." (Exodus: 6:2-3, KJV). They complained because they were hungry. And what did the God do? He didn't punish or reprimand them for their murmuring. Rather, he gave them bread from heaven (manna). The LORD told Moses, "in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD for He has heard your murmuring against the LORD" (Exodus 16:7). As the Psalmist wrote, "the steadfast love of the LORD endures forever" (Psalm 106:1).

Jesus experienced the steadfast love of His Father. He was able to fast for 40 days and nights in order to show the power of God's Word to banish the devil. During these days of Lent, we can focus even more on the Word of God, with Word and Sacrament offered at our midweek Lenten Services, at noon and 6:45 p.m. each Wednesday during Lent.

The devil is persistent in tempting us, just as he was persistent in tempting Jesus. Day after day we

are exposed to more and more challenges to the truth of God's Word. In our culture good is often described as evil and evil good. Jesus teaches us to pray "deliver us from evil." Martin Luther's explanation in the Small Catechism says: we pray that our Father in heaven would "rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation," and take us to Himself in heaven.

We often wonder how Jesus could fast for 40 days, when some of us can hardly make it between lunch and supper without a snack. However, our spiritual hunger is satisfied by the Lord Himself, who feeds us daily by His Word, and offers us His own body and blood in the Holy Sacrament. As we faithfully and prayerfully observe the season of Lent, the Lord provides us with heavenly food. The 40 days of Lent impress upon us the need for daily repentance and a strengthened faith. The devil is very real and as St. Peter reminds us, he is "your adversary," and he "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). St. Peter calls the devil "a roaring lion," because he is brash, outrageous, and brimming with evil. His activity in the world is easy to see.

Lent leads us into Good Friday, a day in which we once again see our suffering Savior, giving His life on the cross and earning our forgiveness. As we celebrate Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday, we recall His words, "because I live, you too shall live" (John 14:19). This is our Lord's promise; life; new life now and everlasting life when beyond the grave.

The power of God's Word was Jesus' help and strength during His time of trial in the wilderness. In all of life's trials and tribulation, Christ is our Rock and our Refuge.

*Christ be my leader by night as by day;
Safe through the darkness, for He is the way,
Gladly I follow, my future His care,
Darkness is daylight when Jesus is there.
(LSB, 861, st.1)*

Rev. Richard Radtke
Pastor Emeritus