

February 28, 2021  
Christ the Rock Lutheran Church  
Farmington, New Mexico

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Matthew 4:1-4

## **CHRIST IS OUR STRENGTH WHEN TEMPTED TO DO IT OUR WAY**

In the name of our Lord and Savior, brothers and sisters in Christ,

*“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”* As children of God we pray those words over and over again. But what exactly are we asking of God? Martin Luther explains in his catechism that we are asking God to watch over us, His dear children; to guard and keep us safe so that the devil, the world or our own sinful natures may not deceive us or draw us into unbelief, despair or any other shameful sin.

The prayer is especially fitting during this season of Lent as we hear how Jesus battled Satan’s temptations, suffered at the hands of wicked men, and had to overcome even the pull of His humanity to fulfill His mission. So, today we hear that Father of Lies, Satan, challenging Jesus with this temptation:

### **“Will It Be God’s Way or Your Own Way?”**

#### **I. When we are tempted, we are tempted as God’s own**

Since Satan often throws the same temptation at us, I’d like you to note first that it is a question that challenges our relationship with God. Let’s see how Jesus handled it.

In every land, it seems, there are places that the locals regard as evil, inhabited by wicked spirits. The wilderness along the Jordan River was considered such a place in Jesus’ time. So when Jesus goes into that wilderness following His baptism, it is not to enjoy nature or take part in the great outdoors. This is an intentional encounter with the forces of darkness.

When you and I pray, *“lead us not into temptation,”* we know, as Luther also said, that God surely tempts no one. God doesn’t deliberately set up encounters with Satan. But Jesus’ case was different. The Bible tells us that He was *“led by the Spirit”* (v.1) into that wilderness, that is, by the Holy Spirit. So this encounter was pre-arranged by God. Moreover, Mark’s Gospel tells us that the temptation continued through all of those forty days Jesus was in the wilderness. Why? - because if Christ was to be our Redeemer, then He had to be tempted in every way that we are, nothing held back. He would have to go toe-to-toe in battle with the very enemy who destroyed the relationship God once had with mankind. And He would have to overcome Satan as our

Champion, for did not God say that this One, the Seed of the woman, would crush Satan's head, that is, his power to rule over all human beings? That work would begin here, in the wilderness, in a direct confrontation between Satan and Jesus.

So Satan attacks: ***"If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread"*** (v.3). Don't think for a minute that Satan didn't know who Jesus was or why He had come from God. Even the lesser demons knew of Jesus. On one occasion a demon spoke from a man it had possessed and said, ***"I know who you are — the Holy One of God"*** (Mk.1:24). The Bible says the primary purpose for which Jesus was born was to ***"Destroy the power of him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil"*** (Heb.2:14). So when Satan says, ***"If you are the Son of God,"*** this is not a question of identity, it's a challenge to prove His identity. It's like the snotty kid's challenge, "You think you're so tough? Prove it!"

Satan also knows your claim and mine that we the children of God. He recognizes on us the mark of Holy Baptism. He doesn't have to ask, "Are you a Christian?" He knows ... and knowing, presents his challenge in the same way as he did to Jesus: "If you really are what you say, then show me."

So what's the harm if Jesus turns stones into bread? Why not give Satan a demonstration of His divine power? But think where this is leading. What's really at issue here is Jesus' trust and dependency as a true human being on the heavenly Father. It was that intimate relationship between the Father and the Son that would sustain Jesus in the trials ahead. Satan wanted Jesus to operate on a different principle: "Make your own choices. Be your own man. Do it your way."

## **II. Where doing things our own way would lead us**

This is pretty heady stuff, isn't it? This appeals to our egos! Does it work? Is Satan's challenge still as successful as it was back in the Garden of Eden when he succeeded in getting Adam and Eve to do it their way instead of God's way? You know it is!

The teenager heads off to college or moves out of home to live on their own. Mom and Dad encourage them, "Get to church. Keep your Bible open. Remember to pray." What do we hear? "Sure, Mom, yes, Dad. Don't worry about me. I'm strong. I know all that stuff." Too often, because it is just their parents' stuff, and not a relationship that has developed with God, that youth begins to operate on the "I" principle. Choices are made without a thought of prayer. Important questions such as choice of friends, values, morals and a marriage partner are addressed from the "I will do what I want with my life" point of view.

Couples come to be married. "Sure, pastor, we intend to have a Christ-centered marriage. We want Him to be the Head of our family." But the months go by and the newlyweds are seldom, if ever, in church. "Well, we've just been busy, getting settled and all," they say. Nor is this true only of newlyweds, is it? I think there are just as many singles and retirees and working folks who have made Frank Sinatra's theme song, *"I did it my way,"* their theme song too.

And what's the result of following the "I" principle? When an entire generation listens to the Father of Lies, this is result:

- 1.3 million teens becoming pregnant each year, and more than half of those pregnancies end with an abortion.
- One in three teenagers has used an illegal drug in the past 30 days.
- More marriages end in divorce today than at any other time in history.
- As more emphasis is given to the “rights” of individuals, the choices they make are costing our society its moral and foundational values.

I am reminded of the mother who took her child to the doctor because the child was eating dirt. “Doctor,” she said, “I have heard that eating dirt is a sign of some kind of deficiency. Do you think my child is lacking something in particular?” “Yes, I do,” replied the doctor. “I believe he is lacking in supervision.”

### III. We turn to Christ who is our strength

I’d like you to think for a moment what might have happened had Jesus given in to Satan’s temptation and turned those stones into bread. While seemingly harmless, it would set the precedent of operating on His own. What if, following that same principle, He had taken the advice of Peter not to go up to Jerusalem? Or, if He had shown the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, what a *real* king looks like? What if He had come down from the cross as some challenged Him to do? We can see that any one of those actions would have meant the loss of our salvation. Jesus knew that what was at stake in this first temptation in the wilderness was that precious relationship with the Father. He had come, as He said, **“not to please myself but him who sent me”** (*Jn. 5:30b*). And what pleased the Father was that this dear Son give His very life as the sacrifice for every sinner.

Do we see as clearly that it is that kind of trust in God and the relationship attached to it that is at stake when we are tempted to do it “our way” and not God’s way?

Our Savior replied to Satan, **“Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God”** (*v. 4*). That is a quote from the Book of Deuteronomy, from a time when Israel grumbled about God’s care of them in the Wilderness of Sinai, and God sent them a bread called manna. But the manna had to be used at once or it spoiled. Thus God taught His people to depend on Him and on His Word, not just that bread. In our text Jesus calls on Satan to acknowledge that truth: it is not what we put in our mouths that sustains us, but what comes from the will of God. If God says, “Live!” then we live. And if God says “Die!” we die, whether our bellies are full or not. As Scripture says, **“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made”** (*Ps. 33:6*), and it is by the power of that same Word that we are saved. Trust God, Jesus is telling us here, and you will discover that God does not abandon His children, His redeemed ones – you, the one whom He calls His own.

It is in Jesus and in His Word and promises that we find the strength to fight this temptation to “do things our way, in our own strength.” When that temptation comes, we are to flee to the safety of God’s Word and turn it back on Satan like a sword, for it is, Scripture tells us, the very

sword of God (*Eph.6:17*). Then, when temptation comes calling, we can say as did Martin Luther, “When Satan asks, ‘Who lives here?’ I tell him, ‘Martin Luther used to, but Jesus Christ lives here now.’”

The next time the tempter comes at you, questioning, calling into doubt your relationship to God through Jesus Christ, give him the answer of Luther, the answer of Scripture: “Because I am by faith the child of God, Christ lives in me, and I in Him. I will trust Him, obey Him. Your voice, tempter, I do not recognize.”

Amen.