

Text: Matthew 4:1-11 First Sunday in Lent. **March 9, 2014.**

God's peace is yours through our suffering Savior, Jesus. Amen.

Have you heard of people giving up something for Lent? It's a long standing tradition in some Christian churches. The custom of giving up something for Lent is rooted in this part of the Bible, the devil's temptations of Jesus. Just as Jesus gave up food for forty days in the wilderness, some people want to remember his sacrifice by giving up something like red meat or chocolate for the forty days of Lent. On a deeper level, some try to remember that greatest sacrifice of Jesus, his death on the cross, by making a smaller sacrifice. When a person gives up something to remember Jesus and his sacrifice, it can be a good thing to do. When a person thinks they score points with God by giving up chocolate, that's way off base. And does giving up red meat or chocolate really compare with Jesus giving up his life for you?

But maybe this Lent, there is something you can give up. It's the same thing Jesus gave up, his entire life. Jesus never once gave in to one of the devil's temptations. Jesus, never once, sinned. I know we can't go forty days or even forty minutes without sinning. That's why Jesus did this in our place. Jesus gave up the devil for life. Now you have eternal life. That's the most important thing to learn. Jesus did what you couldn't, in your place, as your Substitute. Jesus also taught us valuable lessons on defeating the devil. So as Jesus gave up the devil for life, let's think today about giving up the devil for Lent.

There's a very stark contrast between Jesus in his temptations and Adam and Eve in their temptations and even us in our temptations. Jesus had nothing. Adam and Eve had everything. Jesus was hungry. What an understatement! Jesus did not eat or drink for forty days! Forty days! Can you imagine going forty days, or four days, or one day, without eating? Jesus went forty! Nothing at all to eat. And he was hungry. You think? Adam and Eve had plenty to eat. All the trees in the garden, every fruit tree you can imagine. Except one. That one tree was their special opportunity to show love to God by following his command not to eat. They ate. Jesus did not. Jesus was alone. He was in the wilderness, a barren, desolate place. The book of Mark tells us the only other creatures out there were wild animals. Adam and Eve had each other to support each other and defeat the devil's temptations. Yet Jesus alone did not give in. Adam and Eve together (and we along with them), did. Adam and Eve had only one temptation, one command. Yet they sinned and broke that one command. Jesus had three temptations we hear about, but actually it was many more temptations over this entire forty days. The Bible is indeed true when it says, "He was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin." And, "Because Jesus suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." As Jesus gave up the devil for life, give up the devil for Lent.

Let's look at the three highlighted temptations then. First, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." It's interesting, I've been to the place where these temptations probably happened and the stones look like loaves of bread. Maybe looked more so to Jesus after forty days of not eating. But this temptation at a deeper level is really not about bread. It was about Jesus using his power, his power as God, for his own good. Jesus never did that. Jesus always used his power for others. Jesus always used his power in love for others, not himself.

There's something else the devil was implying, which really hits close to home for us. The devil was saying, "If you are the Son of God, why are you hungry?" Why did the Spirit lead you to this desolate place? Why has God forgotten about you? Why has God let you starve? Where is God? Where is your Father? Why isn't he taking care of you? You need to step up and take matters into your own hands and do it yourself! Sound exactly like what the devil says to you? If you are God's child, why aren't you the richest on the block? Why do you get the flu for a week and the people at work who don't go to church don't get it at all? God, if you love me so much, give me the prettiest face so I have all the attention. Give me the smartest brain so I can get the best grades. Give me the skills to get the highest paying job. God, why have you forgotten me!

Jesus simple answer, "It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Wow! That is great comfort, but is that really how we live? If you had no job, no refrigerator, no food, would you be content to say, "It's ok. I'm living on God's Word?" Do you ever say, "I didn't have time to work today, I was too busy reading my Bible?" Do you ever say, "I was too busy to read my Bible today. I had to work?" Give up the devil for Lent? Can't do it! Give up the devil for a day? Can't do it!

Then there's the second temptation. The devil takes Jesus to the highest point of the temple. The devil is a sneaky little guy. He notices Jesus say, "It is written," and then quote from the Bible. So the devil does the same. He says the exact same words, "It is written," and then he quotes from the Bible. Well, more or less quotes. The devil leaves out a few important words. The devil said, "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." The Bible passage actually says, "He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways." To guard you in all your ways. In all the ways of your daily life, the angels will guard you. God's promise does not apply to standing at the highest point of the temple.

Think of the glory Jesus could have garnered. Jesus could have jumped down, created a magic parachute and landed softly on the ground, or never landed on the ground at all. But that was not God's plan, for Jesus to gain glory in this way. So Jesus quoted another passage, the correct passage for the situation and quoted all of it. "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Now we learn from this that the devil quotes the Bible, but leaves out parts and twists the meaning for his own sinful purpose. So watch out, just because someone quotes the Bible doesn't mean they are using it correctly. It doesn't mean they are using the right passage for the right situation. But something I noticed for the first time this time was this. The

devil quoted a good news passage from the Bible, or Gospel, God's promise. Jesus quoted God's command, law, really a bad news part of the Bible. Interesting, isn't it? You would think Jesus would be quoting the good news and the devil the bad news. Maybe we need to watch out for people who only want to say or hear the good news of the Bible. That might not be coming from God, but coming from the devil.

Third temptation now. The devil says, "Jesus, here's all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. I'll give it all to you. Just bow down and worship me." On the surface it seems so silly. Bow down and worship the devil? Why? Who? How? But look at the reward that is offered. All the kingdoms, all the people of all the world. All the people that Jesus is coming to save, he can have them all! He doesn't have to watch his closest friends desert him in his time of greatest need. He doesn't have to be whipped, not once! He doesn't have to be spit on, at all! He doesn't have to feel one blow of one nail. Jesus, this is the easy way out. Just one act of worship and you can have it all.

And doesn't the devil make the same offer to us? You don't have to bother with all that studying and note taking and hours in the desk. Just get the test from last year and memorize the answers. Everyone else is doing it. Just worship the devil this once. You don't have to mess with a lifetime commitment, just hook up. You'll feel good. You can go your ways in the morning. Just worship the devil this once. You don't need to take your valuable time reading the Bible, going to Bible class, attending church. Come on! You have faith. You pray. You're good. Just worship me. Give up the devil for Lent? I can't give up the devil for a day!

That's why Jesus did. Jesus gave up the devil for life, so you have eternal life. Jesus conquered the devil. Jesus defeated the devil. Jesus doomed the devil to death, to give you life. I know during Lent we ponder, in great detail, the suffering and death of Jesus and we need to do that. We need to see the great price for our sins and we need to see the great love of Jesus to suffer for you and die for me! But his suffering means nothing if he's a sinner. His death on the cross means nothing unless he is offering a perfect life and the perfect sacrifice to a perfect God. His tomb stayed filled with his dead body unless he was perfect. And he was. Perfect every day, for you. Living every day, for you. Defeating the devil, every day, for you. Overcoming each temptation in your place, because you could not. Standing in your place as your perfect Substitute, because you could not be perfect for yourself. Offering up his perfect life as the once and for all perfect sacrifice that God's perfection required. As you read and study and ponder this part of the Bible, think of Jesus as your Substitute, think of Jesus doing what you could never do, think of Jesus putting the devil down to death, so Jesus will raise you up to life, eternal life, perfect life.

It's this perfect Substitute, this perfect sacrifice, this perfect Savior that is our power to give up the devil for Lent. Remember, Jesus is Substitute first. Then and only then is Jesus our perfect example. We would really miss something if we missed the lessons Jesus teaches us in how to give up the devil for Lent. Let's look at just some of those lessons. First, most important. It is written! It is written! It is written. It was written. It is written. It stands written. It always shall be written. Jesus used the Bible. That was his only weapon. Jesus didn't do miracles to defeat the devil. Jesus used the Bible! Jesus used the same tool he has placed into your hands. And do you know that Jesus only quoted from one book? Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy? Yes. Deuteronomy. Not many people other than our former Vicar David Sigrist put Deuteronomy high on their list of favorite books. But for Jesus, it was all he needed. Maybe we can learn a lesson to read and study all the Bible, because it's all God's Word and all of it is useful for giving up the devil.

The second lesson is this: God will provide a way out. When the devil told Jesus to do things the devil's way and make stones into bread, Jesus let God do it his way. And God sent angels to take care of Jesus. God provided refreshment to Jesus in God's way and God's time. God provides. Let God do it in his way.

Third and final lesson. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Finally, Jesus simply said, "Away from me, Satan!" Nothing is more hateful to the devil than contempt. Just blow the devil off. He's got nothing on you. God nailed your sins to Jesus' cross. God applied Jesus' perfection to you in baptism. God doesn't need to make you rich to prove you are his child. Jesus' body and blood prove it. Tell the devil to get away from you. Don't give the devil the time of day. Give him up for Lent. Give him up for life. Amen.