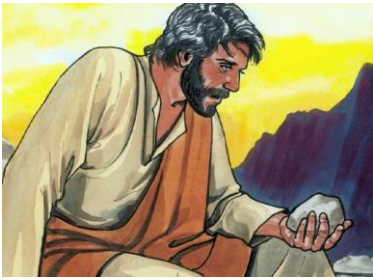


Jesus Has the Last Word
Sermon for the 1st Sunday of Lent (Invocavit)
Sermon Text: Matthew 4:1-11



Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴ But He answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” ⁵ Then the devil took Him to the holy city and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and 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 ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” ⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ⁸ Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to Him, “All these I will give You, if You will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.’” ¹¹ Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to Him.

Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God? If so answer, yes! With this clear confession, we acknowledge the reality of Satan and that he isn’t just a figment of some medieval parents’ imagination to frighten their children. On the other hand, with this confession, we personally declare war on Satan and place ourselves on God’s side. We’ve already confessed this in our baptism. Yet putting this into action is easier said than done. We know all too well how skillfully Satan deceives us again and again through cunning, deception, and sin. In this fight against Satan, we urgently require someone stronger who is on our side and fights for us. In the Gospel reading today, it clearly shows that Jesus Christ is this stronger Someone who doesn’t just fight against Satan but also triumphs over him. In Matthew’s Gospel, the temptation of Jesus by Satan is recorded as being right after His baptism and before His earthly works. By this, it’s already clear from the beginning that Jesus’ mission is of the utmost importance. He doesn’t just want to fight against the evil things of the world, but also confront the root of evil. He wants to fight and defeat the source of all evil. Jesus is the only one who is able to do this. This is, so to speak, the title over His work on earth and ultimately explains this goal. Jesus clearly shows us that He wants to get to the root of evil. This shows up in the temptations that Satan offers Jesus. The first two temptations are actually not bad – but one thing is clear: Satan tempts to turn Jesus from His true mission and deter Jesus from that. Jesus triumphs three times. These three temptations can be summarized as follows: **First**, Satan tries to get Jesus to turn stones into bread; **Second**, he tries to get Jesus to put Himself on display and fall from the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem to demonstrate God’s power; **Third**, Satan promises Jesus the whole earthly kingdom if only Jesus worships Satan. Satan already begins by twisting everything in the first temptation. Isn’t it a fundamentally Christian act to care for the poor and hungry? Wouldn’t that be the very work of the Son of God – to satisfy hunger? Today, many people still say that if Jesus truly is God, He ought to end world hunger. As the Son of God, He ought to not only satisfy our hunger but also solve all our other problems. The economic crisis, the environmental crisis, the energy crisis – “if He had the power,” Satan whispers seductively. Honestly, what would you do if you had the power to turn stones into bread and solve all the economic problems of the world with that? Jesus resists Satan. As the Son of God, He doesn’t let Himself be turned into a bread messiah. He knows that people’s problems are far from being solved even if they are full and have enough money in the bank. “Man shall not live by bread alone,” Jesus

contradicts Satan, “but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” When I hear that, I already hear mocking laughter. The Christians have a lot to say about this topic again – with a full belly and everything their hearts desire, they tell the poor that they should live on God’s word alone. No, Jesus doesn’t disparage the hunger and needs of the poor. That’s why He teaches us in the Lord’s Prayer to ask for our daily bread. He also took care of people’s hunger in other ways, as can be seen when He miraculously feeds thousands of people with five loaves of bread and two fish. But Jesus always wants to make it clear that earthly hunger is just a symptom of a much deeper and greater affliction. People’s separation from God is the true affliction from which all famines and hardships stem. This is where Jesus wants to start. He wants to satisfy the hunger and thirst for God. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Satan doesn’t give up and with the next temptation, sets Jesus on the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem. Here, Satan pretends to be very pious and quotes Psalm 91: God had said that if Jesus threw Himself down from the Temple, He would not hit His foot against a stone. Satan is not agnostic, he believes in God and even knows everything that God can do, but he applies this knowledge to lure Jesus into a trap. What a spectacular proof of God’s existence that would be! Jesus would be carried down from the Temple by angels and then the Pharisees would have no more arguments against Him. It would be clear to all that He is the Son of God. This temptation follows Jesus throughout His entire life. “Give us a sign,” demand Jesus’ contemporaries! Or “if You are the Son of God, come down from the cross!” Jesus doesn’t give in. Demonstrating His power and authority before human eyes would be the very opposite of faith. Jesus’ path is different – He is the Son of God but comes to earth in the lowly form of a human, He is King but as King, He is the suffering One on the cross, He is laid in a tomb, but He is resurrected. To this we hold fast, we don’t need any other signs!

In the last temptation, Satan puts everything on the table – everything is at stake. Satan would give Jesus the whole world if Jesus just bows down to him. Jesus resists this last temptation of assuming power too and remains on God’s side: “You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.” With these words, Jesus sends the tempter back into the desert. He saw through Satan. Jesus resisted Satan’s temptations and seductive offers to possess power and majesty on earth. Jesus sets powerlessness against power, His earthly defeat against success. Jesus’ weapon remains God’s Word, which He accompanies with acts of love.

Back to us, what defines us and what do we let ourselves be guided by? The temptations of Satan are real. We know all too well how often people use God’s name to increase their earthly power and influence. So we ask ourselves this Lenten season too: what defines our lives and what things do we allow to distract us from God and His Word? As can be learned from the various temptations of Satan, temptations are real because they sound attractive, even pious and good. That’s scary and frightening because Satan is out to separate us from Christ. If he didn’t succeed in dissuading Jesus from His mission, he is at least trying to sidetrack us from Jesus. We can learn from Jesus Himself that He always put God’s Word between Himself and Satan. We can do that too. We can take ourselves out of the line of fire by putting God’s Word between ourselves and Satan.

And another thing: the temptation of Jesus is a part of His path of suffering. He endured the temptations so that He could conquer Satan for us. That’s why above this story of the temptation, the words “FOR YOU” are written in great big letters. Jesus didn’t ignore temptation. He endured it in His heart and soul. That’s why Jesus is now also in the middle when it comes to the battle against Satan. Only when Jesus is at my side can I even utter these words: “I renounce Satan and all his works and temptations!” Amen.