

Sunday, February 22, 2026

First Sunday in Lent

Matthew 4:1-11

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

I.

My friends,

Lent begins not in comfort,
but in combat.

Lent is not the season of sentimental warmth and fuzzies.

Lent is warfare.

Immediately after His baptism,

the Holy Spirit leads Jesus
into the wilderness.

He is led there to be tempted by the devil.

That is not a metaphor.

Not symbolism.

Not a psychological struggle.

The devil is real.

Spiritual warfare is real.

St. Paul tells us,

"We do not wrestle against flesh and blood.

*But [we wrestle] against
the rulers,*

against the authorities,

against the cosmic powers

over this present darkness,

against the spiritual forces

of evil in the heavenly places.

Therefore take up the whole armour of God,

that you may be able

to withstand in the evil day,

and having done all,

to stand firm." (Ephesians 6:12–13.)

The devil and his demons are real.

But God is greater.

1 John 4:4 reminds us,

*"Little children,
you are from God
and have overcome them,
for He who is in you
is greater
than he who is in the world."*

In Christ, the battle is real.

And so is the victory.

And that truth strengthens our faith
to persevere through temptation and repentance,
clinging to the Gospel.

II.

My friends,

As Christians,

we will experience weakness
and vulnerability
as we struggle.

We must rely on God's strength, and not our own.

"After fasting forty days and forty nights,

[Jesus] was hungry.

And the tempter came..." (Matthew 4:2–3)

The devil does not fight fair.

He waits 40 days before showing up.

After forty days of fasting,

Jesus is hungry.

Extremely hungry.

Assuming the average male build of the day,

Jesus is hungry almost to the point of death.

Jesus is physically vulnerable.

Physically weak.

Think about that!

Jesus is the one *through whom...*

[God the Father] created the world.

*[Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God
and the exact imprint of His nature.*

[Jesus] upholds the universe

by the word of His power." (Hebrews 1:2–3)

But here He is weak

and starving.

Jesus truly entered our humanity.

Almighty Jesus joined us in weakness.

The infinite Son of God joined us
in finiteness and dependence.

Jesus is a true human.

And here in the desert,

His weakness is real.

His physical vulnerability is true.

And the devil attacks precisely there.

"And the tempter came and said to Him,

'If you are the Son of God,

command these stones

to become loaves of bread.'" (Matthew 4:3)

The devil tempted the first Adam to eat as well.

In Genesis chapter three,

Adam and Eve were tempted in abundance.

Their needs were satisfied.

They were together in the perfect garden.

But here,

Jesus,
the second Adam,
is tempted in hunger and isolation.
Adam fell in paradise.
Jesus stands firm in the cursed wilderness.

My friends,

If Jesus experienced weakness and vulnerability,
we should expect it too.
We should not be surprised by struggle.
Being a baptized Christian does not remove the warfare.
It does not guarantee
easy victory after easy victory.

The season of Lent teaches us

to expect conflict,
and not ease.
We want to pretend that everything is well.
But Scripture holds us to reality.
There will be struggle and temptation.

The corporate life of the Church will also know struggle.

Division.
Discouragement.
Dwindling.
Grumblers.
Cultural pressure.
Lack.
Needs.

But struggle does not mean God has abandoned you.

It may mean you are exactly where God is at work.
Like here in the desert.
Where the Holy Spirit led Jesus
to be tempted for us.

III.

My friends,
 We've seen now
 that there will be struggle
 and vulnerability.

There will also be temptation.

In our Gospel Reading,
 we see the devil tempt Jesus in three ways.
 The devil uses Jesus' legitimate physical need—
"command these stones to become loaves of bread."
 The devil tries spiritual presumption—
 "Throw yourself down, the angels will catch you..."
 The devil offers the glory of a cross-less kingdom— "
All these [kingdoms] I will give You."

How often have people fallen for
 "The ends justify the means?"
 Satan tries to get us to fulfill legitimate needs
 through illegitimate means.
 He tries to show us a more immediate
 and easier way than God's.
 A selfish way.
 A self-full way.
 Not the loving,
 selfless way of God.

And did you notice that Satan quotes Scripture?
 The devil tries to cast doubt
 on what God says in one breath.
 And in the next,
 he tries to appeal to Scripture,
 twisted out of context.

This temptation immediately follows Jesus' baptism.

The heavens had opened.

The Holy Spirit descended like a dove.

And God the Father spoke directly.

*"This is my beloved Son,
with whom I am well pleased."*

And what are the first words out of the tempter's mouth?

"If you are God's Son."

God actually just said that Jesus is His Son.

"If you are God's Son."

It's just like what the devil said in the garden,

"Did God actually say..."

Satan attacks God's Word by casting doubt on it.

Is it really God's Word?

Did God actually say it?

If He did, can you prove it?

Satan attacks God's Word by twisting it.

He pulls verses from Psalm 91 without context.

He uses the promise of protection

to legitimize reckless, suicidal behaviour.

Just to test if God will do what He says.

And in all of this, Satan attacks Jesus' identity.

'Are you really God's beloved Son?

Is He really well pleased with You?

If that's true—

wouldn't things look like this instead?'

In these temptations,

we see an echo of Adam,

and of us.

In Romans chapter five,

Paul explains:

Through one man's disobedience,

many were made sinners.

We inherit Adam's fallenness.

We are not neutral in this spiritual warfare.

We are either in Adam's sin or Christ's obedience.

We need Christ.

For we are vulnerable.

We are tempted.

And left to ourselves,

we fall.

Individually,

we face temptations

to despair,

pride,

and seeking comfort

without faith and obedience.

We are tempted to redefine sin

and its impact.

We are tempted to doubt our identity

as God's baptized children.

Corporately,

we face temptations

to trade faithfulness for 'relevance.'

To replace Scripture and reverence for spectacle.

We are tempted

to avoid the offence of the cross.

We are tempted

to seek influence

and power rather

than repentance

and forgiveness.

We do not win these battles

with temptation on our own.

Adam proves it.

And our own lives prove it.

IV.

But, my friends,
 Jesus fights for you.
 Where Adam failed,
 Christ obeys.
 Where Israel failed in the wilderness,
 Christ remains faithful.
 Where we fail,
 Christ is victorious.

Jesus answers every temptation
 with God's Word.
"It is written!"
 And faithful,
 believing,
 and obedient,
 He stands for you.
 Jesus stands in Your place.

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is not merely an example.
 This is substitution.
 St. Paul says in our Epistle Reading:
*"by the one man's obedience
 the many will be made righteous."* (Romans 5:19b)
 Jesus stands as the new head of humanity.
 The new beginning.
 The new foundation.
 The New Adam
 who encompasses all believers
 in Himself
 and in His obedience.
 All fell in Adam.
 All rise in Christ Jesus.

This deadly wilderness confrontation
points forward to the cross.
The devil will seem to triumph on Good Friday.
Darkness.
Death.
Silence.
A closed Tomb.

But "*joy comes in the morning.*"
Easter declares the decisive victory.
Jesus crushed Satan's head—
as promised in Genesis.

When it appears that evil is winning:
Remember the wilderness.
Remember the cross.
Remember the empty tomb.
There is always victory in Jesus.

You are not alone in the fight.

After the temptation,
angels came and ministered to Jesus.
God sent them in gracious fulfillment
of His promise in Psalm 91.
No putting to the test
or forcing of His hand required.
The Father did not abandon His Son.
And He does not abandon You.

The Same Lord mercifully and compassionately:
Gives you His Word.
Clothes you in Baptism.
Feeds you with His body and blood.
Sends His holy angels to guard and keep you.

When demons,
the world,
or your own sinful nature
tempt you,
you are not alone.
You are not left
to fight by yourself.
God does not abandon you to defeat.
You are given victory.

Victory is not hypothetical.
It is accomplished.
Accomplished in the wilderness.
Finished on the cross.
Victory is given to you.

The heavenly Father
gives us His Holy Spirit,
so that by His grace
we believe His holy Word
and lead godly lives
here in time
and there in eternity.

When we,
by the power of the Holy Spirit,
resist temptation through faith in His Holy Word,
that is victory given to us.
When we confess our failure to resist temptation
and receive forgiveness,
that forgiveness
is victory given to us.

As 1 John 4:4 declares,
*"Little children,
 you are from God
 and have overcome them,
 for He who is in you
 is greater
 than
 he who is in the world."* (1 John 4:4)

V.

So, my friends,
 What does Lent teach us?
 Expect struggle and weakness.
 Expect temptation.
 Expect real victory—
 not because of you,
 but because of Christ.

The devil is real.
 The battle is real.
 But the triumph in Christ
 is more real still.

When the night feels long...
 When temptation feels strong...
 When evil seems loud...

Remember:
 The Second Adam
 has already stood in your place.
 Christ has won the wilderness battle.
 The cross has crushed the serpent.
 And joy comes in the morning.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, amen.