

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 3The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." 4Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" 5Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." 8Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" 9Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' 11and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" 12Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 13When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.*

St. Paul writes: For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Grace and peace to you, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I love to play ping pong. I'm good at it, Good enough that most of the people I play at ping pong don't present much of a challenge to me. But sometimes I have found myself face to face with someone who is better than I - quicker, more skilled. Do I accept defeat? Do I graciously say, "You are my superior"? No.

I become devious -devilish. I do whatever I can do to distract my opponent. Change speeds, break the rhythm of the game, talk about something that will set his or her mind on something other than ping pong. No trick is beneath me, one thing matters, besting my opponent. If I can keep my opponent distracted, victory will be mine.

I've always wondered about the first temptation, turning a stone into bread. Why would it have been wrong for Jesus to have done that? He was hungry, bread is good, wholesome - stones serve no useful purpose.

The second temptation I can understand: Worship me, Jesus, and I'll give you the world.

Hitler thought that bargain was for him. Every tyrant, and ruthless business man and self-serving politician joins him. “What does it profit if one should gain the whole world and lose one's soul?” Jesus later would ask. “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only,” Jesus told Satan.

The third temptation also makes sense to me: Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple, and said, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here.” And then he quoted scripture, the very psalm we read this morning: “God will command his angels concerning you to protect you, on their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone.”

Make God prove to you that God will rescue. Don't trust - make God prove to you that he will do what he says. Jesus replied, “It is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

But that first temptation, one stone to be turned into one loaf of bread - Jesus only needed to speak the word. A stone would have become a loaf of wheat bread, fresh out of the oven. What a blessing from God! And when he got back to the towns, people could all have brought him stones, one by one to become bread. And the thanks would have ascended to heaven, whole families, villages singing praises for the bread. Think of all the joy, the good that bread could bring! What could Satan gain in that?

Think of the dollars we in the church today give that people might have bread - bread for the hungry in Cleveland, canned food for the poor in Lorain. Our Christmas and Thanksgiving offerings here at Christ Lutheran all sent to turn stones into bread, that people might praise God.

Why then was the bread, a temptation from Satan?

Jesus answered him, “One does not live by bread alone.”

As I've thought about Jesus answer, I've wondered: Has the very temptation Jesus did not give into, become Satan's greatest distraction among those who follow Jesus?

One does not live by bread alone.

What is it that obsesses us in the church? Bread. Money.

Bread, money, is how we evaluate how our church is doing. The bread we give, the bread we have.

How many of us lack bread enough? Not one of us. We have food to eat, clothing, yet our habit is fearing that someday we will be without.

I've never known a starving person, at least not one starving for bread. But even here among us are people who though they have plenty of bread are starving for God's word in their lives.

Think about it. Is it a shortage of bread that is the big problem in our nation? Or is it a shortage of hearing and trusting and believing the word of God?

Could it be that Satan is distracting us? If he can think us thinking that the real threat to us is material, physical, a lack of bread, then maybe we will never have time to really hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Maybe we will so concentrate on feeding the poor with bread that we will never get around to feeding their spirits. Maybe he can keep us so distracted with bread that the joy and peace and faith and hope that Christ wants us to know will seem somehow secondary to money and things.

One does not live by bread alone.

Maybe that is why God called his ancient people to give a tithe first - one tenth of their crop, off the top that they might remember who is more essential to them than even food - their God, the Lord.

“We are not struggling against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Jesus struggle on earth with Satan ended at the cross. Satan heaped ridicule on him, stripped him of all clothing, all dignity. Satan heaped pain upon him, thirst, death, broke him in every physical way. But God's spirit within him was not broken. Satan could have every other piece of Jesus, but God's spirit he could never own.

God raised him from the dead in victory. Satan lost; he tried everything but he lost.

Jesus' promise to you is that Satan will lose with you also. Though he heap poverty on you, and sickness, and ridicule, and death, God's Spirit planted in your heart will not be broken. The victory God won in Jesus God will win in you.

For you will not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

I close with these words from Ephesians: 10Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. 11Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand

against the wiles of the devil. 12For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. 15As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. 16With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:10-17.

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