

*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.*

For temptation to be temptation it is not enough that there be something out there but there has to be something in here – a desire in your heart – an appetite, a craving – an attraction from within for temptation to be temptation. Some of you, no matter how hungry you are, cannot be tempted by sushi while another will pay much money to enjoy it. The offer of heroin does not tempt me – resisting it would take no effort at all. But for a heroin addict the pull from within can be so strong that life itself may be traded to satisfy the craving.

For temptation to be temptation there must be a desire within.

Could that have been true of Jesus as well? It is not difficult to understand how the possibility of a stone becoming bread tempted Jesus after forty days of not eating. Hunger creates strong desire. But Jesus would not use his power to satisfy that desire. On that day Jesus would not do for himself what he would later do for a hungry crowd. For when five thousand hungered Jesus transformed five loaves and two fish into a feast for them all. But on this day Jesus did not let the gnawing hunger within rule over him. He waited for his Father in heaven to provide.

But what of the second temptation? *The devil led Jesus up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And 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. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."* What desire was in Jesus to make this a temptation? Did Jesus want the glory of all the nations and authority over them? Was there a hunger in Jesus' heart for that glory and authority? If this was really a temptation there must have been.

When Jesus was with the disciples on the mountain after his resurrection he told them: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” But that authority did not become his by taking the easy way – falling down to worship the devil – no, that authority would only be given to Jesus after he had suffered death on the cross.

I think of our world today – how easy it is for us as a people to think we will change the world with no cost to ourselves. We think we can use laser guided weapons to gain authority over others. Let others be the ones who suffer – not us. Jesus could have chosen that path to power and authority. His disciples and many in the crowds wanted him to choose that path – the path of violence and destroying. But Jesus chose the path not of making others suffer but taking the suffering upon himself – this was the path he would walk, his road to glory and authority. The devil’s offer was a real temptation for Jesus. But Jesus resisted.

The third temptation was to test the love of his Father. *“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you. and on their hands they will bear you up so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”* Maybe the devil even sang these words from Psalm 91 as we do in the song, “Eagles’ Wings.”

What desire was in Jesus that made this tempting for him? I have never had a craving to jump off a cliff to see whether God will rescue – have you? Maybe it was the desire to know now. Today.

Many of us find that God does provide for us day by day. Even in times of serious illness or pain in each moment God provides. But we can want more – a greater security – more happiness – more success. What can get us into trouble is when we are not longer satisfied to live in this day, this moment. Worry pushes faith aside – anxiety drives out peace. Jesus would be falling into the hands of God soon enough when he would plummet into death on Good Friday trusting the arms of the Father would receive him. You and I will all have that opportunity soon enough when we plummet into death as well. This side of the grave the angels did not rescue Jesus and the day will come when the angels will not rescue you from death either. But Jesus raised from the dead is God’s testimony that God’s hands are open – waiting to catch you, to catch me. Jesus did not let fear of what would be rule over him that day but

was ready to wait for the time his Father planned. *“Do not put the Lord your God to the test,”* Jesus told the devil. Then the testing that day was over.

I was talking with a new Christian this past week. He told me how he had been thinking that when he believed some light would flash and life would become clear and easy. But life was still complicated for him – even after he believed. He wondered whether his faith was real.

I reminded him of Jesus’ temptations. Right after the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus that same Spirit led him out to be tempted.

So it is for us. We will be tempted until that day we fall into the hands of the Father. We will be tempted to live by bread alone – tempted to find an easy way – tempted to worry ourselves into tomorrow already today. If we fall into temptation Jesus will come down to us and lift us again. When we resist we will know the blessing of faith in God. That

is the blessing God wants for us all most of all. Amen.