

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” ⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying 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, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” ⁷Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” ¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

The devil waited until Jesus’ resistance was down. Hunger gnawed at him – he was famished.

Isn’t that how it always is? Temptation comes when we are most vulnerable – at the very moment when we might start feeling sorry for ourselves. Just lost my job, the kids are sick, got a bad grade on a test. Your spouse is out of town all week, working, your mom just yelled at you for something your sister did, you were up all night caring for your elderly mother.

So it was for Jesus. The Holy Spirit had entered him – led him into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights with no food.

Then it was the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God command these stones to be come loaves of bread.” That suggestion would not be very tempting on a full stomach.

And notice how good this thing is that the tempter is suggesting. Bread for a famished man.

Or the second temptation: throwing himself down from the temple and being rescued by God – Jesus showing his trust in God in his leaping – God showing love for Jesus in his saving. How good that all sounds.

Or looking down on the whole world and seeing all the kingdoms of the world and all their splendor and to have them all and authority over them all – how good that would be. Jesus ruling over everything and everyone would be a very great good. The love of Jesus at the center of every government policy, the compassion of Jesus ruling economic decisions. So good.

And when you are tempted? Every lottery ticket is filled with images of the good that will result in winning. Every Sunday morning devoted to sleep rather than worship promises rest and relaxation – every look at that man or woman who is temptation for you – every extra-charged conversation with her or him comes with imaginings of wonderful outcomes. The just one beer, the just trying it for the first time drug, the detour to the pornographic web site all promise good feelings. Or maybe it is the cheating on a test that will bring a better grade – the shortcut at work that will move you ahead of a competitor - the covering for the failure of a son or daughter to give them a little help – all look like they will bring good things for you.

And isn't it interesting how Jesus was alone when temptation came. In the wilderness – alone for forty days and nights.

When you and I are alone temptation has greater power. Alone in the darkest hours of the night the temptation to despair, to lose hope, to panic is greatest. When we are isolated by the shame of something we have done the temptation to give up – to run, to hide can be overwhelming. And in grief - alone is the word that describes that sorrow that fills our heart. Alone – in private where no one can see – no one can speak a word to bring us back – temptation is great when we are alone.

But though he was famished, tempted by things that looked good – and was alone – Jesus did not give in to the tempter's power. Jesus was rooted in God's word – he quoted scripture to foil the tempter.

In response to the temptation to turn stones into bread: One does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

And to the temptation to leap from the pinnacle of the temple: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.

And the worship Satan and gain power over all the kingdoms of the world- Away with you Satan, for it is written: “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.”

I think that the temptation of Jesus is chosen as a reading for the first Sunday in Lent so that we will learn from our Lord. When temptation is knocking at the door and I rely on my wisdom and my strength I fall. But when I turn to God, seeking wisdom in his word – relying on the strength of the Holy Spirit – receiving the help God provides through you, my sisters and brothers, then I am victorious or should I say, “God is victorious in me?”

God does not want us alone, seduced by good things that are not for our good at all. God wants you to be in this Christian community nourished by God’s word as you study together, and pray together, and serve together. Almost everything in our culture wages war against our gathering and growing in God’s word. Busyness, entertainment, sports, activities, they all demand our time. It seems no time is left for God’s word.

Jesus wants you to think about what is worth treasuring in life, what will bring you through the trials that are surely coming for you, what you can do to help another. He has called you here to prepare you and feed you. Don’t let the hungers or weariness or disappointments open the door to evil. Don’t give in to the temptation to settle for all those good things that are empty. Don’t give in to the temptation to go it alone.

Trust in God’s word as Jesus did.

You will never be sorry you did.