

Sunday, March 10, 2019 – First Sunday in Lent
“Jesus: Remedy to Half-Truths and Temptation”

Luke 4: 1-13

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Process

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

We speak the truth, but Scripture is often misused by Satan to twist the truth. Jesus says the devil is a liar and the father of lies, that when he lies he speaks his native language. It stands to reason that when it comes to deception he's really, really good at it. But if we know what to expect, what the lies and misuse entail we're more likely to be able to stand up against the lies and know the truth.

But let's also remember that speaking the truth also means rejecting falsehoods. There's this piece that we ask during baptisms, "Do you renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways?" We get to see the drama play out between truth and lies right in our Gospel lesson on this first Sunday in Lent. As Christ reveals himself in the Holy Scriptures, we are reminded that as Christians, we are called to share truth and live in truth. We live as disciples of Jesus – the way, the truth and the life – but we do so bombarded, as Jesus was, especially in times of need and stressed, tempted by satan.

Let's examine the enemy's overall strategy. The ultimate goal of satan is unbelief. The first commandment is where Satan ultimately wants to undo us – "You shall have no other gods." Having other gods isn't always as crass as bowing down to an idol. Our hearts are idol factories, manufacturing things – even very good things, gifts of God, that end up usurping pride of place that belongs to God as the one who we fear, love and trust in God above all things. If satan can tempt you to value even good things like your spouse, your kids, your service in the church can become an idol... much less things like money, respect, power, image – but maybe, the "good" things are even more dangerous because we're so oblivious to what's happening, so

much faster to justify ourselves, so much more camouflaged from other Christians who might spot the problem.

When you get that idolatry pattern that rules his playbook, the individual plays are much easier to spot. The attacks will come in a couple of different directions. Our human nature will allow satan to attack from outside – to be tempted by him directly or indirectly through the world around us. And from the inside our own sinful human hearts we're compromised as well and quite capable of sinning all on our own, thank you very much. Kind of like the ring Frodo carries in *Lord of the Rings* *wants to be found*, our evil inclined hearts want to be tempted. The temptations satan presents to Jesus in our text involve each of the following forms of attack.

Scripture and Tradition

This approach has always been problematic because human traditions will always distort the word of God no matter how pure or of good intention one might think the traditions. Out of an abundance of a desire to be holy and follow God purely some very pious religious leaders of Jesus' day, the Pharisees had developed a code of 613 rules, derived from Scripture, meant to help people keep God's law. This was incredibly well-intentioned, springing out of genuine repentance for the sins of their ancestors. Traditions developed around this code and became in many cases engrained in the culture. Certain traditions by themselves may not necessarily be flawed, as they can be God's gifts to people for part of their basic human survival. The problems come as traditions become the focus rather than Christ, who is the head. Satan will use traditions to distort the truth of God's word.

Scripture and Logic

When logic is employed to bring attractiveness to the word of God and faith, Satan will use that logic to his advantage. All of a sudden, the responsibility shifts to humans to battle Satan countering the armor of God that enables us to stand firm. Where God makes promises, satan sets conditions. We see this in his dialogue with Jesus – "If you are the Son of God..." "If you worship me." If you do this, then this will happen, or then I will do that, or whatever. It takes

what God gives as a gift and attaches strings. It makes love transactional. It puts pressure on you to do something, to earn something, to prove something. Thus, our whole faith and life becomes a grand bargaining chip with God as we deal with Satan's attacks and temptations. God never uses *quid pro quo* "if you do this, then I'll scratch your back" language to describe His dealings with us. *Quid pro quo* talk, "if this then that" talk, "you have to" talk, when it has to do with why God loves you, or for your forgiveness from Jesus, or your eternal life is a dead giveaway for satanic lies and temptation.

Scripture and Manipulation

Sometimes Scripture is manipulated in a way that obscures the idolatry our hearts seek to create. This is how Adam and Eve were tempted – if you eat this fruit you will know Good and Evil – you'll be privy to things currently above your pay grade that only God knows, you'll be like God. God's Law is good, it's His will for what our lives look like. The Word I preach should sting when it hits you in your sin (it does for me, too). Yet when a person is sorry for their sin God doesn't pile on us – He piles on Jesus, on the cross who carried the full weight of our sin. He removes the guilt from us and He gives us Jesus. Our forgiveness isn't based on our meeting some condition, it's a gift from God.

Sometimes though Christians wrongly are tempted to pile on others. We can easily, if not very careful, betray a sense that you're not really loved, or cared for, or important to God if He isn't overtly performing miraculous blessings for you. If you've ever felt God was punishing you, if Scripture was ever used against you as a weapon – if you only trusted God more, He'd heal you, or if you only prayed in greater faith He'd answer your prayer, if you only tithed you'd be able to get that job you want or buy your dream home, or if you only took a step in faith God would do a miracle for you. That's what Satan tried on Jesus – jump off this height and God will save you. Insist God do a miracle to provide for your need, like the stone turning into bread. Miracles don't prove your faith. Miracles only, and only occasionally, confirm faith where it already existed, when it is according to God's mysterious will.

Scripture Alone—The Only Remedy to Satan's Temptation

It's only through Scripture that we can confess with our mouth and believe in our heart that Jesus is Lord. Satan will attack and tempt us in our moments of weakness and suffering. Yet, it is in these moments that we see God's grace and mercy clearly through his word because this is the way of the cross. Let me say that again – God reveals His grace and His mercy THROUGH OUR SUFFERING. Our suffering shows our vulnerability, our dependence on God instead of self-reliance, our need for a Savior. Suffering is never a road we walk alone. It's the road Jesus walks this Lenten season – His road leads to Jerusalem, to the Triumphal Entry, to Gethsemane, to Pilate and Herod and Pilate again, down the Via de la Rosa to Golgatha. Through suffering and the cross we come to God and, with Jesus, overcome satan, and all his works and all his ways.

The temptation of Jesus gives us a glimpse of how Satan works against us. He will take what appears to be the truth and turn it into something that is false. Creating doubt is Satan's first step in all his schemes, "Did God really say..." or, "If this, then I'll do that." As humans, we naturally want to add something to Scriptures to counter any temptation. When this happens, satan gets the upper hand. Therefore, we confess the truth and renounce the false through God's word that brings life and salvation and helps us to overcome the temptations of Satan. It is the Lord alone that we worship.

In Jesus name, Amen.