

## St. Andrew Evangelical Lutheran Church

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" It's Time for Jesus to Get to Work " Matthew 4:1-11

Sunday March 1, 2020 – 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

As we begin the Lenten season, Matthew 4 shows us the beginning of Jesus ministry. Jesus had a job to do. The heavenly Father at the end of Matthew chapter 3, at Jesus' baptism had just shouted from the clouds above, **"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."** (Matthew 3:17)

This baptism in the River Jordan was Jesus' Inauguration. His coronation. When John the Baptist poured the water over him, and the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove, and the Heavenly Father voiced his approval for the world to hear, this was Jesus' anointing. (Acts 10:38) This was his being set apart for the Lord's service. This was Jesus' installation. His ordination. This was his Divine Call issued by the Father himself. It's Time for Jesus to Get to Work!

And what was Jesus' job? What was His assignment from before the beginning of time? The Apostle John sums it up this way. **"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."** (1 John 3:8)

And what, pray tell, was the devil's work? A bite of forbidden fruit in the Garden—that was devil's work. Feeble excuses and passing the buck: **"It's not my fault. It's the woman you gave me."** **"It's not my fault. It's the serpent you created."** That was the devil's work. Cain murdering his brother, Abel—that was the devil's work. David lusting after Bathsheba while she bathed on her rooftop, then taking her as his own and murdering her husband—that was the devil's work. Peter, turning the air blue with his curses as he denied his Savior in the courtyard of the High Priest—that was the devil's work. The blood lust of the crowds on Good Friday, and their murderous shouts of **"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"**—that was the devil's work.

Telling lies, cheating, stealing, fighting, gossiping, worrying, backbiting, cursing, getting drunk, being lazy, being spoiled, being selfish, being arrogant or proud, being tight-fisted and uncharitable, hypocrisy, moaning, groaning and complaining about everything under the sun—add whatever sin to the list that you can imagine—it's all devil's work!

But it's our work, too. Isn't it? It's not as if we always go kicking and screaming into sin, as the devil drags us off yet

again against our will. Too often, isn't it just the opposite? The devil plants the temptation, and we bite right away—hook, line and sinker. Because it's what we want! It's what we dream will make us happy! We put up no fight at all. Other days, maybe we fight a tiny little bit. **"No, I really shouldn't have an extra piece of cake. I need to lose some weight."** But when it looks so good on the plate, how often does our resolve melt away, as another forkful of luscious cake passes our lips?

How easily we are all tripped up and trapped by the devil and his work. And how quick we are to try to pass the blame to anybody and everybody else for our own work, our personal sins. An abusive parent. A violent, drug filled neighborhood where we grew up. An unreasonable teacher who ruined our self-esteem. Bad influences among schoolmates or neighbor kids. Robber barons who control all the wealth, so we little people don't stand a chance. It's Adam and Eve in the Garden. Déjà vu all over again.

These excuses will be repeated by every generation, until Jesus returns on the Last Day. Yet they'll never do a bit of good. They will not wash before the Lord who instructed his servant James to write, **"When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; <sup>14</sup> but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."** (James 1:13-15)

This is the devil's work, and this is our work. And this is why we absolutely needed Jesus to get to work. We desperately need the One who was **"led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil."** (Matthew 4:1) Wait a minute! Did we hear that right? Jesus **"was led by the Spirit?"** **"To be tempted by the devil?"** We heard it right. Our Lord does not procrastinate. He does everything in precisely the right time. His time. The appointed time. Jesus had a job to do. And now - It's Time for Jesus to Get to Work!

This is why, immediately after Jesus was announced to the world as the Father's precious Son and our Savior, that Savior went into the desert. There for 40 days he would fast. That in itself would be a severe test, wouldn't it? A test of conviction. Of inner resolve. But let's not forget another critical piece of information about those 40 days. According to Mark, Jesus was tempted by Satan all that time. And

Jesus was all alone, Mark tells us. Only the wild animals were with him. (Mark 1:13)

What were those temptations like that Jesus endured for 40 days? How many dirty tricks did the devil play? Did Satan try to get Jesus to feel sorry for himself? Did he seek to drive a wedge of envy between the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son? Did the devil try to get Jesus to doubt himself? We can't know what those temptations were like during the 40 days. The Bible doesn't tell us. Instead, Scripture records only the last three temptations that Jesus endured in the wilderness. One involved bread. One involved the highest pinnacle of the temple. And one involved bowing down and worshipping Satan. And each temptation, in one way or another, was about self-preservation.

Making bread of out stones? After 40 days, I couldn't even tell you how hungry I would be. But all the experts say that you can only survive up to 3 weeks (21 days) without food and only 3 days without water. For Jesus to have gone 40 days and survived would be considered a miracle. So, imagine what it was like for Jesus after 40 days? Imagine how strong this temptation, **"If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."** What a little thing, and how simple for the Lord who miraculously provided manna for the Children of Israel for 40 years in the wilderness.

What a little thing! And yet what a big thing! For with that single action, Jesus would be showing a lack of trust in His Father to take care of him. The same Heavenly Father who had already taken care of him during the 40 days! But not to worry. It's time for Jesus to get to work and He used the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3. **"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"**

What did the devil do? What he always does. He attacked again, even harder. He took Jesus up on the highest pinnacle of the temple and dared Jesus to jump off. Bible archeologists tell us that this peak of the temple tower was located on the southeast corner of the temple, overlooking the Kidron Valley. 450 feet below. What kind of a hair-brained temptation is that? Why in the world would Jesus ever consider it? Because the devil had Scripture to back up his temptation. Psalm 91:11-12. **"(The Lord) will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."** So? So, think this through. Jesus jumps off. The angels swoop in and set him unharmed,

perhaps right in front of the temple gates. The people, the Sanhedrin, the high priests, why even the Romans mass to him and accept him as god in their midst. There'd be no need to go through that messy business of the cross.

The temptation was all about self-preservation. Selfishness. And also, about a lack of trust in the Lord's plan. You see the Devil want Jesus to choose any other way other than the cross. But that's not Jesus. And that's why Jesus once again wielded the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. This time Deuteronomy 6:16. **"Do not put the Lord your God to the test."**

But the devil still doesn't give up, does he? He never does. He just gets more desperate. Desperate enough to take Jesus to a very high mountain, show him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor, and say, **"All this I will give you. . . if you will bow down and worship me."** Again, the Devil was telling Jesus that he didn't have to suffer and die. If Jesus would bow down and worship him there would be no need to do the work that God sent Him here to do. Satan was selling this temptation as yet another opportunity to avoid the cross. To avoid God's Judgment. To avoid the agony of death and hell. It was another temptation all about self-preservation. But that's not what Jesus is all about. Instead, he was and is always about His Father's business! He is the One who **came, not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.** (Matthew 20:28)

So once again, Jesus used the Word of God to defeat Satan. Jesus sent the devil packing. **"Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"** (Deuteronomy 6:13) For the third time in the desert, the heel of Jesus came down hard and fast on Satan's head. But it still wasn't the death blow. That would come some 3 years later, through the cross and the empty tomb.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, what does this Bible story teach us? What does it urge us to do? To know our Bibles better. Perhaps to memorize some Scripture, so when the devil comes slinking around with his temptations, we can pick up the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and fight off his attacks. We can **resist the devil, and he will flee from us!** Good advice, and Scriptural. (Ephesians 6:10-17, James 4:7))

But what about those days when we're too ashamed to wield the Sword of the Spirit in public? What about those days when we forgot to put on the belt of truth? Those days when our breastplate of righteousness is somewhat

dented, and it's got a few chinks in it. What about those days when the shield of faith slips from our hand, and the helmet of salvation falls off, because we're running so fast in the wrong direction away from the spiritual fight?

What about those days that are still way too full of the devil's work, and our work? For all those days, there is this divinely inspired record of Jesus' fighting with the devil in the desert, doing the work that God the Father sent Him to do. Amen.