

St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Rector

Scripture: Mark 1:9-13

“Jesus 3, Satan 0”

We read today in the Holy Gospel that Jesus was in the desert for forty days and forty nights being tempted by Satan. The number forty appears throughout Holy Scripture – it is significant in requiring preparation and obedience to God’s will! Here are some important examples:

- Noah and his family spent 40 days in the Ark – while the rest of mankind paid the price for their disobedience – as it rained for 40 days and 40 nights. (Genesis 7:12)
- Moses spent 40 days of preparation in the wilderness: Exodus 34:28 tells us that *“he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water.”* (also, Deuteronomy 9:18,25)
- The Israelites were to spend 40 days – but because of their disobedience they wandered for 40 years: Deuteronomy 8:2-3 *“You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. “He humbled you and let you be hungry and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.”*
- Elijah spent 40 days and nights in solitude as he ran from Jezebel as we can read in 1 Kings 19:8 *“So he arose and ate and drank and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.”*
- Israelite spies took forty days to spy out Canaan (Numbers 13:25)
- Israel served the Philistines for forty years (Judges 13:1)
- Goliath taunted Saul’s army for forty days before David came to slay him. (1 Samuel 17:16)
- The number of lashes as punishment must not exceed forty. Jesus received 39 lashes when he was scourged at the pillar, (Deuteronomy 25:3)
- And lastly – it was forty days between Jesus’ Resurrection and His Ascension – preparing the Apostles, His disciples, and the world for the birth of the church – through the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

The number forty is a sign of preparation, of obedience, and of testing. Jesus, the Son of God, experienced testing in the wilderness after fasting for forty days and nights. He was hungry when Satan came to Him. Jesus exhibits the faithful obedience of the Son to the Father where Israel failed miserably.

The things offered to Jesus – bread, safety, and the kingdoms of this world—are rightfully His - being the Son of God, the Messiah. Jesus is called to be obedient to the Father, not only as Son but also as a Servant. Jesus is to be a model of obedience to the will of the Father with the immense pressure of severe testing and at the cost of self-denial – the emptying of Himself – *“taking the form of a bond-servant and being made in the likeness of men.”* (Philippians 2:7)

He would express His Messianic identity to the world, only in agreement with the will of the Father.

Jesus' obedience to God the Father is exhibited through humility, service, and suffering. That is true greatness! Jesus submits to the will of the Father and demonstrates the relevance of the first great commandment from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 - the Shema: "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*" (You heard those words at the beginning of the service today.) Jesus in His life works exhibits His submission to it. He is a living example of how Christians can live as sons and daughters of God, in full obedience to the will of God, including life's difficulties and tests. Those tests will not be the same as those faced by Jesus, which have to do with His being the Son of God and His obedience – even to death on the cross.

In our tests, as Christians, we are called to self-sacrifice, and obedience to God's will. We are called to believe and accept the freedom which Christ obtained for us on the cross – and learn to not only forgive others who wrong us – “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” We must not only forgive others – but probably the hardest task of all is for us to forgive ourselves. We have a most wonderful model to follow, for as Hebrews 4:15 tells us: "*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.*"

There is a correlation in Holy Scripture to this account of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. I want to suggest to you a remarkable relationship between the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden and the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness of the Negev. I want you to listen to these words from Genesis 3:1 "*Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"*" The serpent questioned the woman about God's command and the fruit of the tree. The Gospel of Matthew 4 is an account of the serpent showing his ugly head once again! "*The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."*" (Matthew 4:3) This first temptation is in direct apposition to what Jesus had just heard when He came up out of the Jordan. (Mark 1:11) "*And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*" Satan uses that moment as a springboard – tempting Jesus by saying “If You are the Son of God...then do something spectacular!”

A second temptation came in Matthew 4:6 saying to Jesus, "*If you are the Son of God, he said, throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He 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.'*" He uses God's own Word from Psalm 91 to tempt Jesus – that He would not be injured – and tempted Him to prove Himself.

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And then a third time Satan was offering to Jesus something that he did not even own – and in Matthew 4:8-9 *“Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”*”

Each time Jesus is tempted He answers with the Word of God – the Sword of the Spirit, trusting completely in the Father and to serving Him only. Jesus’ first response was from Deuteronomy 8:3 as He said, *“It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* The second temptation Jesus responds again from Deuteronomy 6:16 *“It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”* And then when Jesus was offered the kingdoms of the world, He had had enough from the tempter – and He called him by name saying, *“Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”* (Matthew 4:10) Jesus had just come through the waters of baptism – like the Israelites had come out of the waters of the Red Sea, but through the River Jordan. He had faced the equivalent of their 40 years in His 40 days and nights, meeting the enemy head on – “face to face!”

Did you ever notice that opportunity knocks only once, but temptation bangs on the door repeatedly – over and over again?

Everyday we are faced with tests, with temptations – but always remember:

- They aren’t there to weaken us, they’re there to make us stronger
- They aren’t there to make us bad, they’re there to make us better
- They aren’t there as a penalty, they’re there as a privilege to prove ourselves to Almighty God
- They’re there to strengthen us for God’s purpose”

The Apostle James has quite a bit to say about being put to the test: *“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”* (James 1:2-4) This church is filled with champions: we have a runner that is constantly winning medals, Stephanie works hard for every race that she runs. Her daughters are champions – in swimming and gymnastics. Adalyn, one of our acolytes is a champion – she was in Chicago last weekend competing against others from around the country. Collier and Hollis are swimmers – and they have their share of medals. It doesn’t come easily – it comes with trials, testing, and hard work. And how many of us have been through sports and other things. Gray and Anne don’t play without practice – they are as good as they are because they work hard. Each one of us have been put through trials and put through tests. James later writes in that same chapter: *“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”* (James

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1:12-13) God is not setting a trap for you, waiting for you to slip up – instead, He is ready to catch you when you fall, and to hold on to you, to embrace you, to save you!

When Jesus refused to go the way of the tempter – instead He was embracing the way of the cross. The temptations, the taunts, were meant to stop Him from carrying out God’s calling on His life – to redeem Israel and to redeem the world. Our temptations that we all face might be very different from the ones Jesus endured – they may be different than what each one of us endures - but they have the same point – the enemy is trying to distract us from serving God. God has a calling on each one of our lives and the enemy will stop at nothing to try and throw the kitchen sink at us – to test us and to distract us from God’s plan for our lives. Have you ever noticed that when you might be heading out to do something important at the church or with a civic group – something that you are doing to serve others – that things suddenly get thrown in your way – to knock you off track? That is what the enemy likes to do – he likes to distract. He likes to try and test us – distracting us from God’s plan. Like Jesus – we must use the Holy Word of God – the Sword of the Spirit to fight back and resist the trials of the tempter.

In closing, I want to remind you of the words of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians: *“Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”* (Ephesians 6:13-17) My brothers and sisters, during these 40 days of Lent and beyond, keep your eyes on God, put your whole trust in Him and when the enemy whispers in your ear – simply tell Him “No – the in the Name of Jesus!”