

Sermon – Matthew 4:1-11 (Lent 1 - 2022)

Lord God, heavenly Father, inasmuch as the adversary does continually afflict us, and as a roaring lion walks about, seeking to devour us: We beseech You for the sake of the suffering and death of Your Son, Jesus Christ, to help us by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and to strengthen our hearts by Your Word, that our enemy may not prevail over us, but that we may evermore abide in Your grace, and be preserved unto everlasting life; through the same, Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.

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

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

² And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.

³ Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

⁴ But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

⁵ Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple,

⁶ and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In *their* hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"

⁷ Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'"

⁸ Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

⁹ And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

¹¹ Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

These are Your words heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Theme: Jesus Saves Us From The Devil's Wilderness

1. We are God's people in the devil's wilderness
2. Our Substitute's been there, done that, and won

Dear fellow redeemed,

Baptism puts us in a wilderness.

In the Old Testament, there is a type, or foreshadowing, of baptism. Paul says, **“Our fathers were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea”** (1 Co 10:2) They emerged from the Red Sea as new people, saved from slavery, but where did they end up? They ended up in a wilderness, wandering there for 40 years. They had no home. They encountered enemy nations, hunger, and thirst. They were faced with temptations to grumble against God, and to worship false gods. They struggled with doubt and unbelief.

Then Jesus, too, was baptized into His redemptive office. He was anointed by the Holy Spirit to be sacrifice to remove the world’s sins, and the Father voiced His pleasure in Him. But immediately after He left John the Baptist at the Jordan, He was led into the hostile wilderness to suffer hunger and thirst, and constant attack from the devil.

And then we went through something similar. We were baptized, and through it, we received Christ’s forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. But ever since, our lives have been spent in the hostile wilderness.

I’m not talking about desert and tumbleweeds. I’m talking about the spiritual wilderness we live in. Don’t be deceived to think that we are in a spiritually friendly area. Don’t think that as long you don’t live in the big city that you can be spiritually at ease. The world is a spiritual wilderness, and its god is Satan. Put on your Bible glasses and open your eyes. This world became hostile to us when we became baptized believers in Christ.

When we were still unbelievers, we were at home here on this earth in Satan’s territory. Paul describes this in his letter to the Ephesians (2:1-3), **“And you *He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.*”** Satan was quite content to keep us.

But when we were baptized, this world we called home all of a sudden became a wilderness for us. We became strangers here, and the devil became furious against us. Through Baptism, we became servants in Christ’s kingdom, but we live in the enemy’s land. Though the world may appear friendly and accommodating is truly in service to Satan.

As you live in this wilderness, the devil is raging against you. St. Peter writes (1 Pe 5:8), **“Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”** The devil hates you, and he seeks to destroy you and your faith. He wants nothing more than to separate you from the love of God. And he has his fiery darts constantly firing at you.

He is an expert deceiver and tempter. In the Garden of Eden, he deceived Eve and tempted her to disobey God, and the devil succeeded in his plan. That same Satan is active in the world, scheming to tempt you to sin and fall away from God.

He doesn't appear before you with horns, a pointy tail and a pitchfork. He rather places before us that are appealing, things that would seem good for us, things that seem to be harmless. Look at the temptations he put before Jesus.

The first was the temptation to self-reliance rather than trust in God. If you're hungry, you have the ability within you to feed yourself. Take matters in your own hands. Trust yourself. That's an enticing temptation! And how effective it is! That was behind the whole "spiritual, but not religious" movement, that seems to be the standard religion today. Many don't want a religion over them. They don't look to Scripture as God's Word to them. Rather the source of their "spirituality" or to be honest their religion are the desires of their own hearts. They have taken their religion into their own hands. With their hands, they create a god in their own image. And their god is like them. They foolishly trust in themselves. Whether it is to reject the laws or promises of God's Word, or to trust in yourselves to remain in faith, these are the temptations of the devil. And you can do this all the while you keep a superficial show of piety. Dangerous.

The second was the temptation to glory. "Jesus, you can jump, you'll safely land. People will praise you and worship you! Isn't this God's will?" Hey we can say that your great works are for the glory of God, but hey, can't we have some eyes on us? We seek to bring glory to God, to magnify him but can't we have some eyes on the one who brings that glory? Our sinful nature is prideful. The devil tempts us to satisfy that prize, and to justify it by putting it under the cover of glorifying God.

The third was the temptation for worldly things. Remember that we are in a wilderness. The devil doesn't put before us things that look so bad for us. I heard about a persecuted Christian in North Korea saying that Christians have it harder in the United States than they do in North Korea. The evil of the world is very clear there. It is clear that this world not for them. It truly feels like a wilderness. They look forward to the life to come. However, here, the wilderness doesn't feel like a wilderness. Though peace, freedom, and prosperity are gifts from God, the devil tempts us to view this world as nothing like a wilderness at all. He tempts us to see that the world is good. He tempts us to desire the blessings of God rather than God Himself. But St. John writes (1 Jn 2:15), **"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."**

As baptized Christians, we live here as pilgrims, in a life and death struggle against the temptations of the devil. We fight against self-reliance, against pride, and against worldliness. It is right and necessary to hate these things, to hate the devil and his cunning, to hate temptation and sin, to hate worldliness.

It is difficult, it's exhausting, and in our weakness, we fail. We sin against God. We are wretched sinners.

But the devil has not won the battle over us, because Jesus, our Substitute won the battle over the devil for us. Since Adam and Eve fell into sin, all mankind, including, us were helpless under Satan's power. Our disobedience to God's Law condemned us to death. **"But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law to redeem those under the law"** (Gal 4:4-5).

In His baptism, Jesus entered into His work as our Substitute to be our Redeemer. So right after His baptism, He went to the wilderness to battle against the devil for us. The devil tempted Jesus to doubt whether His heavenly Father would provide for Him. The devil tempted Jesus to bring glory upon Himself, by safely jumping down the cliff before the eyes of all. The devil tempted Jesus with all the riches, power and glory in the world.

But Jesus did not give in to the temptations of the devil. Not once throughout His entire life did Jesus give in to the devil's temptations. Jesus was perfect. He lived the sinless life we could not. And as the Substitute for the world, Jesus' perfect and righteous life is given to all. This is just as Paul wrote in our Epistle for today, **"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous."** (Rom 5:19). This is the righteousness that you received in your baptism, **"for as many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"** (Gal 3:27). This is the perfect righteousness that you have now by faith, for **"To him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness"** (Rom 4:5).

Jesus was our Substitute in His perfect life. He was our Substitute in His death for our sins. As our Substitute, Jesus won the victory over the devil. He has won for us deliverance from Satan, from sin and from death, and has given us an inheritance in heaven.

This is all yours by faith! And though we live in this wilderness, though we are attacked on every side by the raging devil, and in weakness, we fall into sin, we still have our Substitute's victory.

Where do we find this victory? Where do we find the strength to live our Christian life in this wilderness. The answer is God and His Word. As you hear the Word of God in church here, you are at an oasis in this wilderness around us. As you study God's Word at home, you sit in God's shelter. The devil cannot stand God's Word for it is the power of God. In the Word, your faith is secured, your justification and your victory are secured. The Word is the Christian's blessed home in this hostile wilderness, because it is the dwelling place of our Father, in His grace and goodness.

Though, in Baptism, we enter this hostile wilderness, it is still the most blessed gift. The battle we fight today in this wilderness, is a battle that was already won 2000 years ago in Jesus Christ. Baptism placed you in Christ's victory, and God's holy Word preserves you in it. And then when your last day on this earth comes, your days in this hostile wilderness will be over. You will then cross the Jordan into the Promised Land! On that day, you will be with your Father in your heavenly home. Lord, grant this to you saints. Amen.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be forevermore. Amen.