

Sermon – Luke 4:1-13
David R. Lyle
Grace Lutheran Church
1 Lent – Year C
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“Get Ready”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. The temptation is sometimes just too much. Resistance is not always possible. Sometimes our schedule is such that we just have to grab fast food. It's not what we want to do. Well, maybe it is. Maybe I'm just looking for an excuse. This weekend, the Grace seventh and eighth-grade boys are playing in the Lutheran state basketball tournament. Anders had to get out to Roselle after school on Friday for their first game, so we ended up at McDonald's for a quick bite before the game. After placing our order via the giant touchscreen menu, because even the most banal experiences are now devoid of human interaction, the machine spit out my receipt. Our order number? 666. The number of the beast; the sign of Satan! Which, frankly, considering that it's the first weekend in Lent, felt a little much. I mean, dude. Satan. Bruh. We're already at McDonald's. You've won. Lighten up.
2. No, I don't really believe that the devil had anything to do with my order number at McDonald's or the fact that we ended up there at all. I can talk myself into such foolishness all on my own, thank you very much. And whether or not the devil has horns, a tail, and a pitchfork is beyond me. But I do think the devil is real, and very much at work in our world. For all our aptitude for sin, the evil in this world seems greater than the sum of its parts. Make no mistake, this doesn't let us off the hook. Our choices are our own. But there are forces at work beyond us, too.

3. On this First Sunday in Lent, we are driven into wilderness again, as we are each year on this day. Jesus, still dripping with the baptismal waters of the Jordan, is driven into the wild. Famished after a forty-day fast, Jesus is empty except for the Holy Spirit, which fills his being. The devil comes at him, offering so much more than cheap fast food. It is not the tawdry or scandalous that is dangled before Jesus. In this hungry world, Jesus is offered bread. In this misgoverned world, Jesus is offered the power to make things right. In this dangerous world, Jesus is offered the protection of the angels. Goodness knows that the world could use the bread, not to mention a king like Jesus. Angelic protection is nothing less than Jesus is due. So, what's the problem? The devil is in the details of the contract. He is seeking to turn Jesus away from God, the only One whose Word gives life; the only One worthy of worship; the One whom we should not put to the test, even when we are being tested. The devil's temptations are all predicated on that little word, "if." The problem isn't so much what the devil is offering; it's what he's asking. He is asking Jesus to doubt the presence and the promises of God. But in the Jordan, God spoke clearly: You, Jesus, are my Son. In the wilderness, Jesus is empty, hungry. But he has not forgotten. There is no "if" in his identity. The devil cannot win the day.

4. We, too, are empty. All too susceptible to the devil's temptations, never mind our own inclinations. We find ourselves in the wild, in a world that still can't manage to share its bread; in a world in which many are willing to lose their souls in exchange for worldly power; in a world in which people are willing to give their worship and praise to anything, anyone, other than God. But here at the start of Lent, we are reminded that sin and evil are not just out there in the broken systems and structures around us. Sin and evil are not only found in those with whom we disagree, those who would wish us harm. Sin and evil are in here, too. In us. In you, and in me. This past Wednesday, we were marked with ash, reminded of our mortality and our sin. The ashes

themselves come not from our worst vices but from our best intentions, from the branches of Palm Sundays past. By ourselves, even our good intentions come to naught. Thank God that we are not by ourselves. Thank God that we are marked not only with ash, but with the cross of Christ, the One who went into the wilderness and won the victory for us.

5. We recently started rewatching *The Lord of the Rings*, because my faither-in-law just finished the books for the first time and hasn't seen the films. It's fun to see the movies, which I've seen so many times, through the fresh eyes of someone else. A scene early on in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first book and film, jumped out at me. Having learned that the magic Ring he's inherited is the one true Ring of power in which are bound up the evil, hatred, and malice of the dark lord, young Frodo tries to give the Ring to the good wizard, Gandalf. Truly tempted, Gandalf finds the strength to resist. "You cannot offer me this Ring," he tells Frodo. "I would use this Ring from a desire to do good. But through me, it would wield a power too great and terrible to imagine." This is the same truth Jesus declares in the wild, that we cannot make good flow from evil. Good comes only from God.

6. As we embark upon this season of Lent, Jesus invites us to set aside our "ifs," our vices, and our best intentions, and to trust instead in God. We, too, are still wet with the waters of baptism, there waters in which there are no ifs, and, or buts. There is only grace, only promise; the strong word that you are a child of God, and that with you God is well pleased. Friends, the world is hungry. Broken. Misguided and power hungry. Turn again to Christ, who chose the way of the cross instead of the way of glory. Turn again to Christ. Filled with the Spirit of God, resist the forces of sin and evil. For his sake, do good in this world, that all may know the gracious reign and rule of the God of grace. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.