Matthew 4:1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil.

There is no doubt, this world is filled with so many different difficulties. Sometime I think we forget exactly why those difficulties occur. If you would, I am going to use this history of the temptation of Jesus to speak of and address the issue of the temptations and trials you and I might also face. I am going to do this not because I think the temptation of Jesus so unimportant but rather because I think to have a lesson on the battle that is going on in this world is also important to speak of. In other words, I want to address what is going on in your life.

But before we do that, I do want to make sure you grasp exactly why this history of Jesus is given to us. Please note it is not a complete history. I say that because the text tells us that Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted, of course, tempted by the Devil. Do you honestly think that in a period of 40 days and nights the Devil could only come up with 3 temptations? The truth of the matter is we are only told of 3 specific temptations but trust me, a whole lot more went on that we are not aware. We are only told 3 because that is sufficient for us to grasp the ways and wiles of Satan and sufficient for us to grasp the wisdom and strength of Jesus. Satan fails. Jesus wins. Satan is tricky, Jesus is wiser. Satan is deceptive, Jesus true and honest. But really, the most important thing to grasp is that Satan fails and Jesus wins.

That is not what happened with Adam and Eve. With those two, the trickery and deception of Satan was absolutely sufficient to get them to disobey the one rule that God had given. Yep, Satan got Adam and Eve to eat of that fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of God and Evil and with that eating to bring into our world the devastation and horror of sin. Because of the Fall into sin, Satan is still able to tempt us, to try and destroy our very souls. He is now more limited in his abilities to tempt us but that limitation is not in any way shape or form going to stop him from trying. Let’s talk about what Satan will do, will attempt to do in our lives. Our theme will be: **TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL.**

Here is what I want you to truly grasp. The Devil, because you are called to be a child of God, is going to unleash every weapon and every trick he can in order to try and destroy your soul. Here are a few passages to help you grasp just what you, today, are still up against.

***Revelation 12:9 and 12: The great dragon was thrown down—that ancient serpent, the one called the Devil and Satan, the one who leads the whole inhabited earth astray—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him…Woe to the earth and sea, for the Devil has gone down to you. He is full of rage, because he knows that his time is short.*** (The Devil is full of rage! You are his target!

***1 John 2:16 For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, boasting about material possessions—is not from the Father but from the world.***

***1 Timothy 6:9 Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into complete destruction and utter ruin.***

***2 Corinthians 11:14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.*** (That how deceptive he is. When you think sin is “okay” it is because of the work of Satan to destroy your soul.)

***1 Peter 5:8 Have sound judgment. Be alert. Your adversary, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.***

***James 1:14-15 But each person is tempted when he is dragged away and enticed by his own desire. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.***

Please note that these are not the only passages that speak to this subject, but I think these will suffice to help you grasp some very important things. Satan is real. He is out there, in our world, looking to destroy your soul. He is deadly. He will use whatever and whoever he can to destroy your soul. Family, children, friends, money, disease, hardship and on and on will be the weapons he brings against you. Worse, he will use your own sinful nature to deceive you and cause you to pursue and love sin to your eternal damnation. Satan does not care about you. He only cares about bringing hurt and pain to the heart of God. He wants to distress God by luring your soul away from his love and grace.

By the way, if there is one thing that is clear to us in every history of temptation we are shown, Adam and Eve’s or the temptation of Jesus, it is the fact that Satan will use God’s Word. He will twist it, make it say what you want to hear, lure you aside by it, and make it seem as if God is somehow your enemy or that God is withholding his good and love from you. He told Adam and Eve that God didn’t want them to eat because they would become like God! It was a lie. Notice what he does with Jesus. “Your Father is keeping bread away from you, make bread yourself!” “Your Father says you will not stub your toe, so throw yourself down and see if that is true!” “I will give you the entire world,” but people, the entire would already belonged to Jesus as true God and Lord!

Here is what I can tell you. I don’t know entirely what is going on in your life but if there is something that is luring you away from the love and care of your Heavenly Father and his Son Jesus as given in the Gospel in Word and sacrament, then understand, you are being tempted, you are being attacked in order that Satan might destroy your soul!

Here is what our very beautiful Catechism in its marvelous simplicity says. Question 363, *What is meant by temptation?* Answer: *a. Any situation in which a person may be deceived or led astray into false belief; b. Any situation in which a person may be led astray into despair; c. Any situation in which a person may be led astray into great and shameful sins.* Again, make no mistake. The Devil wants you to abandon faith, forget trust in God and deny God’s Holy Word. He will use anything. In the life of Jesus, he used Jesus’ teaching about him being the bread of life and a large majority of disciples were offended and walked away. The Devil, in Nazareth, used the brothers and sisters of Jesus who lived among them as a reason to reject and desire to kill Jesus. The rich young man walked away from Jesus because of his wealth and money. Even Judas would betray Jesus for a mere sixty pieces of silver. The Devil does his work and he does it well.

And if the Devil can get you to despair, he will do it. He will beat you down so that you have trouble grasping the love and grace of Jesus. All because we don’t understand things. One of the most common ways I see the Devil working against souls is to strike them with something and then lead them to believe that God is being unfair and mean. “I don’t deserve this treatment from you God,” you say shaking your fist at God. If you have ever sat in my Bible classes you have heard me say, “Here is the way it should be. Whenever good and blessing come your way, that’s when you should shake your fist and say, ‘I don’t deserve this God.’ But when troubles strikes, fall to your knees and say, ‘Lord, you have given me what I deserve. Be my help and strength!’” We get it exactly backwards! If the Devil can cause you despair, he will!

And great and shameful sins! Don’t you finally get how this Jesus stuff works? God in grace and love will forgive every sin, any sin if we are but truly sorry and filled with remorse. Yet repentance is more than just saying, “I’m sorry!” It is the desire to stop the sin, to work at doing what is right and then having the full trust that Jesus does forgive you because of his love. But when you, supposed child of God, declare that your sin is your right and Jesus has no right to tell you what to do, the clear and plain truth is that Jesus will say to you, “Yes, if you desire hell, then I grant you your sin and wish!” Satan loves to destroy by great and shameful sins. And what is even worse, today he leads us to believe and think that what Jesus calls “great and shameful” is but a trifle and a “get off my back Jesus” thing. The Devil is at work. I don’t care what you declare or say, if what you are doing is clearly contrary to God’s Word (and trust me, it is clear) you are not following Jesus, you have abandoned faith, and you are in the grips of Satan!

Do I want you to despair? Absolutely not. In the Revelation passage we heard earlier, as we hear that “woe to the earth and sea” we also hear this: **“They conquered him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony. They did not love their lives in the face of death.”** Those words tell us that in Jesus we too, win. The power of the Devil has been broken in Jesus. The ability of the Devil has been very much limited before us. Listen to these passages of our Savior, all of this based on the fact that Jesus is the Savior, the Son of God who has defeated sin, death and the Devil.

***1 Corinthians 10:12-13 So let him who thinks he stands be careful that he does not fall. No testing has overtaken you except ordinary testing. But God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability, but when he tests you, he will also bring about the outcome that you are able to bear it.***

***Matthew 26:41 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.*** (That is said to the disciples on the night Jesus is betrayed and arrested to die. How much trouble the disciples could have saved themselves had they followed this advice!)

Again, listen to 1 Peter 5:8. ***“Have sound judgment. Be alert. Your adversary, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.”*** As I say to people, cats, big cats, small cats any normal cat on the prowl to kill does not roar! They are sneaky, stealthy and deadly. But God, when the devil is on the prowl, makes him roar. If you are paying attention you can know he is around, you can avoid him, get away from him and live. But we don’t pay attention. We are not alert. And then when some great sin comes our way and we in disobedience jump in, we have the gall to blame God and curse his name or his servants when corrected!

How about James 4:7-8 ***So, submit yourselves to God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God, and he will come near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded people.”*** I so love this passage. We are told that just resisting the Devil will cause him to flee. Because we place ourselves into the hand of God. Yet this passage lays out what our problem mostly is. We are double-minded. We think we can have all the sin we want and Jesus too! Not so. Yet, how do you resist? You are not going to stop drinking by continuing to show up at the bar. You are not going to resist your adultery by being alone with your sinning partner. You can’t be filled with the love of Jesus when you harbor hatred and wickedness in your heart.

I will illustrate this point in this way. There we are, somehow we have taken it upon ourselves to have this giant pet bear. The bear tears apart our house, our friends, our family and everything it can reach. The bear is destroying us. We know we need to get rid of the bear. But instead of getting rid of the bear, we put it in an adjoining room, so we can visit when we need. Or we put it in the basement and then constantly send our friends and family down there to supposedly get something. We ban the bear to the garage and only bring it in on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Or we put the bear on the neighboring property and visit every day. We pretend to get rid of this dangerous pet bear. We cry about all the damage the bear does and gripe that God doesn’t do something. We are so pitiful in our own destruction. And today, instead of calling these things sins, we call them “addictive behaviors” and act as if somehow they are not really our fault. Wake up. Be Alert. The Devil wants you to sin as badly as he wanted Jesus to sin! The Devil wants to destroy your soul!

But again, I remind you that Jesus wins and the Devil loses. Jesus does indeed defeat and break the power of sin, death and the devil through his suffering and death, through his resurrection and ascension into heaven. Jesus is there to help. Jesus is there to guide. Jesus is there to forgive and then leads our hearts to be filled with sorrow and the desire to stop.

We will close with these passages: ***Hebrews 2:18 Indeed, because he suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. 1 Corinthians 10:13 But God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability, but when he tests you, he will also bring about the outcome that you are able to bear it. 2 Timothy 4:18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. Romans 8:28, 34b, 37 We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose…Christ Jesus, who died, and, more than that, was raised to life, is the one who is at God’s right hand and who is also interceding for us!...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*** We are victorious in Jesus. But that means we hear and follow him. Amen.