

*St. John Lutheran Church*

*The Sermon*

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Sermon, February 26, 2023

Matthew 4:1-11

I have to start out by saying something about Eve in our Hebrew Scripture for today. Eve is often blamed for the fall of humankind, because she ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. However, both Adam and Eve ate of the tree, both Adam and Eve forget that they are made in the image of God, with God's very breath and strive to be like God when they already have God in them. Adam forgets who he is too, so it's not just Eve.

And at least Eve put up a fight. When the serpent lies with half-truths, she corrects him. And even after Eve is thrown out of the garden with Adam, she still has a relationship with God. She gives birth to Abel, and says, "With God's help, I have produced a person." We don't hear from Adam at all after they are thrown out. But later, after one of the most horrible things that can possibly happen, occurs, Cain kills Abel, Eve has another son. She calls him Seth and she says, "Because God has appointed him for me, to replace Abel." She still has a relationship with God. If anything, Eve is an example for how we live in our crazy world, keeping God as a part of our minds.

Jesus keeps God as a part of his mind in the Gospel lesson for today. The devil comes to him and says to him, "If you are the son of God."

Now, in the verses immediately before the gospel lesson for today, Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist, and the heavens open up and the Holy Spirit comes down like a dove, and God says, "This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased." So, there are no "ifs" about it. This question has already been settled.

But the devil says, “If.” “If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread.”

You see how subtle the devil is. You see how cunning. Bread is good, in and of itself. It is created by God. There is nothing wrong with bread. There is nothing wrong with providing for ourselves and our families, with feeding ourselves. It’s just that, when we listen to the devil’s “if,” we go crazy.

“If you were a child of God, you would be able to provide for your family better, you would have a nicer house, a nicer car. You wouldn’t be in debt like you are. You would have more money.”

Indeed, when we forget that we are God’s children, then there is a hole inside of us, which we try to fill with more and more things, more and more money. But it will never be enough. The love with which we provide for ourselves and our families stops being love, and instead becomes greed.

Jesus says, “People do not live by bread alone.” Our cars, our houses, apartments, clothes, shoes, even our food do not make us important, valuable, worthwhile or dignified. God does. Jesus lives by the word of God which called him Beloved Son. We live by God’s word which has called us beloved children.

When we understand that, we can use what we have not just for us, but to help everyone to have enough.

The devil takes Jesus up to the pinnacle of the temple, and again, tries to take to focus off of God. The devil says, “Throw yourself off the pinnacle, and God will send God’s angels lest you strike your foot against a stone.” God will see to your safety.

There is nothing wrong with seeing to our own safety and the safety of our families. But when we forget that we are God’s children, that we are held in God’s hands, then we have to do more and more to keep ourselves safe. We have to sacrifice other people’s safety and well being to make ourselves just a little more safe. We have to ignore other people’s needs in order to avoid any risk. We become selfish.

Jesus says, “it is written, you shall not put the Lord our God to the test.”

We trust God to see to our safety, even if we die. So we can work for others’ safety.

The devil takes Jesus to a high mountain. He shows Jesus all the nations of the world and says, “All of these can be yours, if you worship me.”

If.

If you lie in order to get what you want. If you put down other people in order to make yourself look good. If you destroy others and exploit them in order to pad your own pockets. If.

We worship the devil when we do these things. When we stay quiet and let other people spout derision on folks who are vulnerable or different from us, we are worshipping Satan. When we refuse to acknowledge the truth because it makes us feel uncomfortable, we are worshipping Satan.

Power is a good thing. Exercising influence in the nations of the world is actually required by God. Jesus requires us to speak up according to God’s priorities as revealed by Jesus. Jesus requires us to vote according to his values. We are required to exercise our power.

We are required to exercise our power among the nations to serve God, not just satisfy ourselves.

The devil’s if.

Now, here is some good news. Instead of the devil’s “if,” Jesus brings us God’s “when.”

When we don’t have enough bread, God is still with us. Even when we have lost sight of our places as children of God, God is still with us, pulling us back around to God’s life. This is what happens in our baptism, every day we are pulled back to God’s life.

Even when we are terrified. Even when we are destroyed and we have no safety at all, or we have forgotten who we are and instead allow ourselves to be manipulated by fear and enslaved to terror, Jesus still comes to us, at the cross. Jesus still saves.

When we have forgotten the purpose of power, and instead of using it to serve others, we seek it for its own sake, striving to win by any means, God still confronts us. God still heals us.

Remember who you are. Made in the image of God, returned to the image of God, every day. No “ifs.” Always. Thanks be to God.