

# “I’m tempted! Are you?”

The 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent sermon presented by The Rev. Philip A. Rodgers  
presented Sunday, Feb 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at Trinity United Church in Malton, related to Mark 1:9-15

The Text For The Sermon: *“He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.”* — Mark 1: 13

I’m tempted! Are you? What could it take to tempt you? Something on the internet? There is stuff out there that is too good to be true. What about food? The chocolate cake on the table is calling out “eat me, eat me.” Maybe you’re tempted by power. Do you want to get elected to something? Maybe you want to be the mayor, or Prime Minister? Temptation’s only boundary is imagination!

Mark says for 40 days, Jesus was tempted by the Devil. What does 40 days have to do with anything? For 40 years the Israelites were walking in the wilderness and tempted by the unknown. For 40 days, Noah was in the ark being rained on, and his faith was tested. For 40 days, Moses was on Mount Sinai. The people did not know what had happened to Moses and even doubted he was alive. Elijah was on Mount Horeb for 40 days. Do you notice how the number 40 just keeps coming up? It’s this great time of testing.

A spiritual wilderness is where Jesus was led: a place where you can’t seem to feel the presence of God anywhere around you. You pray, you fast, you worship and raise your hands. There’s nothing there. Walking around in a daze, you ask, “What was that all about?” Wilderness.

So for 40 days Jesus ate nothing and he was famished. He was hungry...and the Devil tempted him. *“If you are God, turn this stone into bread.”* Ah bread. It’s a basic food to live on. Do you ever go into a bakery just to get a smell of fresh baked bread? Jesus answered back...*“man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* That’s a quote from Deuteronomy. Jesus is saying that bread is just bread. There is nothing of real substance there to completely nourish you. He is saying, *“You got bread, but that bread came directly from God. God is the one that supplies all your needs.”* He’s the one you have to lean on.

After Jesus said that, the Devil took Jesus up to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world. *“If you worship me, all this will be yours. You will have glory and authority.”* That is a temptation. Riches, power, love, glory! Jesus knew that people wanted him to be a conquering Messiah. They wanted him to come to them on a white stallion and save them.

Which one of us would have given in to *THIS* temptation? Money equals power, right. People defer to you whenever you come into their presence – if you have money. Getting to be first in line every time and sitting at the head of the table. Giving the toast to start the party. Quick promotions. Your name in the paper. Former US President Bill Clinton, when asked why he did some of the “least flattering” things he did, he answered, *“Because I could.”* It wasn’t an arrogant answer, just an honest one.

Unfortunately, the Devil is a liar. Satan does not have the authority to give that power to anyone. The Devil shows his hand. *“If you worship me...”* yes that’s what those who want power and position are looking for: “worship”. *“I’ll put my name on buildings all over the country and have large casinos and a TV show.”* Anyone in particular come to mind? Worship me. But Jesus answered him *“Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.”* Look at the Ten Commandments. *“You shall not have any other Gods before me...nor serve them.”* Notice that Jesus said to the Devil, *“worship the Lord **YOUR** God”?* Even if the Devil didn’t believe Him to be Almighty God, He still was. That reminds me of a bumper sticker I saw the other day. It said. *“God doesn’t believe in atheists.”*

For the last test, the Devil takes Jesus to the top of the temple. Yes...**THE** Temple. That's where the people go to meet with God. The Temple. If someone jumps off the top of the temple and then lands softly on the ground, people are going to notice. People are going to bow down and worship. *"His angels shall watch over him and he will not dash his foot on a stone."* Even the Devil can quote from Psalm 91. Satan will use scriptures to make his case. False teachers will come up in the church like wolves in sheep's clothing. They will say things to tickle your ears...

Another way to test God...Homer Simpson says this, *"Dear Lord, the gods have been good to me. For the first time in my life, everything is absolutely perfect just the way it is. So here's the deal: You freeze everything the way it is, and I won't ask for anything more. OK, deal?"* You ever make a deal with God like that? Jesus answered, *"Do not put the Lord your God to the test."* And the Devil left him until a more opportune time. Do you know what that means? The Devil comes back again and again. He doesn't just ping us once and then run away. This is the drive by, shoot, go around the block, shoot again, go around the block, shoot again.

You say, *"I never fight with my husband?"*, and then have a fight the next week. Have you ever said, *"I manage my money and don't have problems?"*, and then miss up the next month's phone bill? Everyone has points of vulnerability that are like a crack in the dam. Just a few drops of water will get through at first, and you may not think anything about it. But soon, it's a steady flow. Then a waterfall. Then the whole dam comes crashing down. Temptation will come in when you least expect it. How to deal with these temptations? Be grounded in the Word of God...Psalm 25 says, *"You are upright and good, O God, therefore you show the path to those who go astray. You guide the humble to do what is right, and teach the lowly your way."*

I had a conversation with a friend recently, and everything that could go wrong in his personal life - did. That is what Jesus was going through in those 40 days in the wilderness. These are spiritual attacks that can only be defended spiritually. This is what Jesus does. He holds up the shield of protection; his faith in God. Flaming arrows of temptation that are hurled at us, can be blocked. When you are attacked like this, ground yourself in The Word. Seek out others who have gone through the same problems. Trust me, you are not the first, nor the last person to go through ANY situation. If you are having a situation right now and tempted and you're not sure what to do, talk to someone about it, check in with God and pray about it. You will discover that it's not too great for you and God to tackle together.

*This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Amen.*