

Sermon on **Matthew 4:1-11** for 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent  
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Remember when you could just play in the sandbox and make up your own fun. Toy trucks worked construction sites or were getaway vehicles, planes could take off from the sand and land perfectly, turned over buckets became castles, and of course the fun of picking up some dried animal turd and not realizing what it was until after it was in your hand. In some ways, life doesn't change much. There are many opportunities that come through our hands and they have to be ordered and of course there are the turds too. Maybe it is the coordination and management between a drive thru window, kitchen, and cash register to the more complexities of an organization with many employees, processes and bottom lines, none of it without the turds of struggle and disappointment, none of it happens without the people knowing who they are, what they are to do (purpose) and why they are doing it (who is it for). Today we see Jesus bring order and priority even amidst all the struggle. We realize how desperately we need him.

**Jesus is Our Champion.  
He knows who he is.  
He knows what he has to do.  
He knows who he's doing it for.**

*"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry."* The baptized Son of God and Son of Man followed the Spirit's will and he went willingly into a battle zone that we know all too well and where we have suffered all too many losses. Jesus went to be tempted by the devil. Jesus had no sinful nature like you and I, fallen human beings. The devil himself tempted Jesus no doubt over those forty days and nights. Was the battle so fierce that Jesus did not even eat? Whatever the reason for the fast God sustained him with the energy needed, much like he had other believers over Israel's past like Elijah (1 Kg. 19) and Moses (Ex.34). Jesus felt his mortal need. He was hungry – true Son of Man – going through the same struggles as we do. The devil takes his opportunity.

*"The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'" A question we often struggle with in this life though we need not is, "Who am I?" We wrap our abilities, our self-worth, how others view us all together and we get so confused. Jesus could do miracles as the Son of God. He proved that time and again. Not a bad thing. But here we must remember what Scripture has always proven and as Pastor Smith says, "The devil is never your friend." He only ever wants to get you and me damned to hell. So he intended with Jesus. "If you are..." Who was the devil kidding? Jesus knew who he is – the Son of God and the Son of Man. He need not doubt his relationship to the Father. Jesus is the Christ. Jesus trusted his Father perfectly and what the devil saw as a weakness and opportunity, Jesus shut the door swiftly by quoting God's Word in Deuteronomy 8:3, "Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" If God wanted to give him food, he could have manna come down from heaven. The Father had said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Jesus wouldn't doubt him for a second. If God didn't give it to him, he didn't need it. He was pleased to be the true Son of God in the flesh. Find your identity in our **Champion who knows who he is.***

*"Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: " 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" The devil is tricky. Did your parents ever say to you when you wanted to do something dumb because 'all my friends get to do it,' "If your friends jumped off a bridge, I'm guessing you would want to as well." We take great comfort that God protects us from many assaults of the devil each day. We pray in Luther's morning prayer, "Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me." It is sinfully testing God to intentionally put ourselves in harm's way when we have no command of God to do so. The devil wanted Jesus to test his Father, not trust him. Never trust the devil's use of Scripture. Jesus responds from Deuteronomy (6:16) again, *Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"* Wow. The devil tried to take the sword of Scripture from him, but Jesus knew Scripture does not contradict Scripture. You set the passages next to each other. Let Scripture interpret Scripture. It is clear, not as subjective as some might want you to think. We trust God and we don't unnecessarily jump off bridges. Your dad was right. Your Heavenly Father is right. **Our Champion** shows he knows what he has to do – know and follow God's will from the Word.*

How many times hasn't the devil tricked us with these temptations, even without Bible passages? Adam and Eve in the garden had every need supplied and the love of God visible each day in all they had and did, but they gave it all up because they believed the devil's lie and were made to doubt their good Father and who they were. They did not want to repent – so quickly the fall corrupted them completely. God didn't stop loving them. He confronted their sin. Adam blamed Eve; Eve blamed the devil. They didn't want to say, "I sinned. I doubted your love for me when I wanted something you said "no" to. God help me." So God showed just how bad things had become with them – the consequences of sin, even death, the burden of guilt and shame they bore and we do too. God showed them just how badly they needed a Savior whom he in his amazing mercy promised to send. Your sin is not ok. Your sin is an offense to God. Repent of it. Leave it. Find forgiveness in the only place you will find it - **Our Champion!** Pray each day for strength to fight these battles against Satan, the world, your sinful nature. Pray for God's holy angel to protect you. The battle is hard. And this next temptation shows just how hard.

*"Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."* The devil is powerful. The devil tries to lay claim on this world in his own mind because God has given him a long leash in some respects. If Jesus wouldn't doubt who he is, nor doubt his purpose, maybe, just maybe, he would doubt who he is doing all this for. The devil promised to give him what Jesus had come for – the world. It could be his with no cross, no pain and suffering, no more rejection by men. Jesus had fasted 40 days and 40 nights. He was hungry. Esau sold his birthright for some stew because he was famished after the hunt. Can you imagine 40 days without food and water, and tempting by the devil himself? Jesus didn't come to be some earthly ruler, or have some forced obeisance by sinful mankind, nor did he forget who he is, whom he had come to serve, and who he was doing this for. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:28). Jesus said to him, *"Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"* (also in Deuteronomy 6:13). Jesus faced the devil one on one and victored. He had come by the will of his Father in heaven, taken on flesh to save mankind. He fought the devil and won, not just this time, but every time.

This battlefield had our blood spilled all over it – doubting who we are and trying to find our worth in things, accomplishments, spending our time so worried about our bellies and personal needs. Jesus kept his focus on the one thing needful – trusting our Father in heaven and trusting his Word no matter our outward circumstances – whether a lush perfect garden or a barren wasteland with no food or water.

We didn't throw ourselves from the temple, but we jumped into the darkness of sin all too easily. Foolishly we thought freedom was to run from the light of God's law to the darkness of sin and "doing whatever I wanted."

We bowed the knee to the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh for far cheaper sums when he offered that thing we wanted at all too easy a price, not waiting on God's timing or God's path for us, but taking the devil detour in sin, only to find ourselves chained and trapped in sin.

Throughout history there has been the concept of choosing a champion to fight for you – someone you select, your best, and their fight against the enemy's champion would determine the entire battle. Goliath the Philistine champion offered this to Israel, to David. The devil approached with all the tricks up his sleeve that had slayed the souls of men all too often. But Jesus answered. He drew the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and he defeated the devil. He did not doubt his Father's love though hungry in the desert. He did not jump to test if his Father loved him, but stood on the Word. He did not bow, but gave glory alone to his Father even though it meant suffering and a cross to come.

The devil retreated to look for other opportunities, but Jesus did not stop. He knew who he was, why he had come, and who he was doing this all for. When even Peter was led to say, *"Never, Lord!" "This shall never happen to you!"* *"Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!"* Jesus Our Champion continued to the cross to pay the price that broke our chains of sin, shame, guilt and death. He rose from the tomb to the glory of his Father and to show you that you never have to doubt **who you are** – God's own baptized child, so that you **know what you have to do** – follow your Savior's Word and deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him, so that you know **who you are doing this for** – to give glory to God in all things until the day he takes you home to heaven.

*"Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him."* God is in control. He knows what we need, when to help, when to give it. So go to live in the sandbox God's given you. Strengthened by God's Spirit whom he poured out on you at your baptism, trust your Father. Follow his will even when it means suffering. This is what Jesus did for us to bring us to God. Live as he did - To God be the Glory. **Jesus is Our Champion.** Amen.