

## 2008 February 10<sup>th</sup> Matthew 4:1-11

Before we get started on today's gospel reading before we even put a title on this periscope it would be helpful to understand the goals of the two teams, at least it seems like there are two teams.

Now in football there is an offensive team and a defensive team. The Offensive team's goal, their reason for being is what? To score points, or runs or baskets, you get the idea.

The defensive team's goal or reason for being is to stop the offense from scoring.

That reminds me of that game between the two worse football teams in Minnesota. One from Northern MN and one from Southern MN. They played to see who was the worst team in Minnesota. They played night and day for three days and nobody scored. I told you they were bad. They also weren't very motivated and who can blame them who cares if you're the worse or the next to worst team. Finally the team from the north quit and walked off the field. Three plays later the southern team scored.

Ok well in our gospel the two teams we have is God and the Devil. What is the Devil's job? What's his goal his reason for being? Hurting people is just a side benefit. His or Her job is to turn people away from God. To get people not to trust God. What God wants is to get people to love and trust him.

Sin simply put is not trusting God. The things we do like breaking the Ten commandments are just side effects resulting from not trusting God. You could call them acts of sin. The flow from the sin it self which is not trusting God. For example we are hungry and don't think that God will provide for us so we take things into our own hands and steal. We feel threatened we don't believe God will protect us and so we take matters into our own hands with violence.

Sometimes is more complicated than that but for right now lets just go with the basics. God wants us to love and trust him. The devil wants to prevent us from trusting God.

So why am I going into all this before we actually get to the reading? Let's turn to Matthew 4:1 in your bible. While you are looking that up let me remind you where we are in Jesus' life. Jesus has just been baptize by who? John the Baptist. As he is coming up from the water the Holy Spirit descends on him. A voice from heaven says *This is my son the beloved in whom I am well pleased.*

Alright now we are at Mt 4:1 *Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*

Wait a minute. Who led Jesus into the wilderness? The Spirit?

Why did the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness? To be tempted

By who? The devil.

There are many interesting things about this reading, this one verse is interesting. One challenge the translators had with this verse is the word peirazo. Peirazo is Greek for tempt, or test or a number of other words. That's one of the challenges of translating from an ancient Greek text to a post modern English text. Some words in Greek can be translated in to a number of different English words.

Fortunately here in this context the choice is between tempt and test and that doesn't seem to be that big a deal. But what is the difference between tempt and test?

The explanation I like the best is when we are tested the tester is hoping that we will pass. I know as a former student this is often difficult to believe, but the tester hopes you will win or pass.

The tempter is hoping you will fail.

So remember our two teams? God and the Devil. Who do you think is the tempter? The devil.

Who do you think the tester is? God. Most people don't have any problem believing that the devil is the tempter. Some people wonder if God is also tempting us wanting us to fail so that he can punish us. And when we think that the devil has won already hasn't he?

I don't think that there is any doubt that what we find here is the Devil tempting Jesus. I also think something else is going on here. Jesus is led to the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil but who led him there. The Spirit. The Devil might have evil in mind, well it's not that he might have evil in mind. He does have evil in mind. Could it be that while the Devil is tempting, God is testing. While the Devil is tempting Jesus hoping he will doubt God, could it be that God is testing Jesus' trust?

Jesus has just heard during his baptism that he was the beloved son of God. The Devil keeps tempting trying to get Jesus to wonder about that saying, If you are the Son of God. The devil knows Jesus is the son of God but he is trying to get Jesus wonder so that he will prove to the devil and himself that he is the son of God. The Devil is trying to find just a little bit of doubt. If there is a little bit of doubt maybe Jesus will test his powers and prove to the devil and himself who and what he is. If he turned the stones into bread he would be showing that he didn't trust God when he was hungry.

If Jesus drove off that building in the hands of the holy angels, he would be misusing his position. Jesus didn't come to this world to jump off of buildings so the angels would catch him. He would be doubting the Father's plan for him.

If Jesus worshiped the Devil in order to become the ruler of the world. He would be showing his mistrust in God. If you're on the winning team and you believe you are on the winning team why would you join the losing team?

In a sermon, Martin Luther said:

God uses the devil and the evil angels. They, of course, desire to ruin everything; but God blocks them, unless a well-earned scourging is in order. God allows pestilence, war, or some other plague to come, that we may humble ourselves before Him, fear Him, hold to Him, and call upon Him. (*In other words trust him*) When God has accomplished all these purposes through the scourge, then the good angels come again to perform their office. They bid the devil stop the pestilence, war, and famine. So the devil must serve us with the very thing with which he plans to injure us; for God is such a great Master that He is able to turn even the wickedness of the devil into good. [*What Luther Says*, Vol. 1, pages 401-402]

What Luther is saying is that God uses the devil to test people. God's purpose is to strengthen their faith and trust in him. The Devil's purpose is to destroy our faith. With evil intent the Devil tempt to destroy but God uses it for good.

Lutheran's love baptism because we hear in baptism the promises of God's love. The promises of Baptism lead us to love and trust God. In many and various ways the Devil tries to get us to forget and doubt God's love and trustworthiness. I wonder if it matters if the challenges we face in life and faith are temptations initiated by the Devil or the testing of God. Our job is to love and trust God. Our calling is to love and trust God through the good the bad and the ugly. To love and trust God in our successes and our failures, in our joys and in our mornings.

I know this sounds simplistic but wouldn't it be great when we are facing the difficult struggles of life, wouldn't it be great to say to the Devil, Huh, you think this tempting is going to turn me from God. It just makes my faith stronger.

You are God's beloved children, children of the promise. Just as God only Son the beloved was tempted and tested so will you be. Do not buy into the temptation from the Master of lies. Believe and trust in the one who always keeps his promises.

Amen.