

Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Luke 4:1-15 **“A Necessary Engagement”**

March 5, 2017
(1st Sunday in Lent)

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Main Street UMC
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646
Church Office: 864-229-7551

“Following Christ From City Center!”

LUKE 4:1-15¹ "A NECESSARY ENGAGEMENT"

"..the Son of Adam, the Son Of God," 3:38, // Mt. 4:1-11

1) w.1-2 INTRODUCTION: HOLY SPIRIT, JORDAN, DEVIL, TEMPTATION, Q (Mk. 1:12-13).

Sonship Requires Obedience, Loyalty Test, Spirit's Presence

1 And Jesus, **FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**, returned from the **JORDAN**, 3:22, From His Baptism, Is. 42:1
 2a and was led (continuously) by the **SPRIT** for forty days in the wilderness, [Time], Judea, Spirit (2x) Picks A Fight!

TEMPTED (continuously) by the **DEVIL**. 11:24, 1 Jn. 2:15, Testing/Real Battle: Heb. 2:14-18, 4:15

b And he ate nothing in those days; and/ Gk. kai (4x), Radical Dependence, Focus Through Fasting
 and when the days were ended he was hungry. Weak, Not Thirsty, Some Water To Survive Wilderness

1 Cor. 10:6-9, Luke's Temptation Order = Ps. 106:14-15, 19-20, 32-33

2) w.3-4 1st TEMPTATION: POWER FOR HIS OWN BODILY NEEDS: STONE.

Love Pleasure Satan Has A Voice = False Guidance, // ISRAEL AND HUNGER (Ex. 16)

3 The devil said to him, Siege Begins, Plants Doubt, Operate Independently: //Genesis 3:6a

Provision "IF (since) you are the son of God, Satan Assumes Sonship: Dictates Possible Actions To Demonstrate
 command **THIS STONE** to become bread." Question God's Provision And Care

4 And Jesus answered him, What Mean To Be Son Of God? You Should Not Suffer!
 Dependence On God For All His Needs

"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" Life Of Appetites Only = Dead End, Deut. 8:3a

1) Jesus Decides About The Body/Appetites: Trust/ Delayed Gratification

3) w.5-8 2nd (CENTRAL) TEMPTATION: WORSHIP THE EVIL ONE.

Love Possessions Last In Matthew, // ISRAEL AND IDOLATRY (Ex. 32)

5 And the devil led him up Imitates The Leading Of The Spirit (v.1)

and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, [Time]

6 and said to him, Jesus Dialogued With Devil, Reported The Story, Gen. 3:6b

Priority a "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, Prideful Oversell, Visionary Experience

b for it has been given to me, p.v., Subordinate! Forfeited By Adam/ Eve: Gen. 3, Half-Truth

b' and I give it to whom I will. a.v., Temporarily Only! Devil Wants A Change Of Command

7 a' IF you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours." Shortcut Around The Cross, v. Exodus 20:3

Alliance With Evil Is Offered, // Dio Chrysostom, 2 Fort 64.14

8a And Jesus answered him, "It is written, Sword Of Spirit, Eph. 6:17b

b a 'You shall worship No Shortcuts, Only One Who Is Loyal, Obedient

b the Lord your God, Jesus Takes Way Of Self-Denial/Service

b' and him only Submission/Loyalty To God

a' shall you serve." Deut. 6:13-15

2) Jesus Decides About Worship, Loyalty, Service: Orientation/ No Quick Fix

2') w.9-12 3rd TEMPTATION: POWER TO PROVE HIS IDENTITY: STONE.

Love Glory Last Temptation In Jerusalem Temple, Publicity Stunt

9 And he led him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, 450 ft. Vision

Protection "IF (since) you are the son of God, "Let Go And Let God," Flashy Display For The Crowds

throw yourself down from here, Temptation To Display Divine Rescue/Care

10 for it is written, // ISRAEL TESTS GOD'S FAITHFULNESS (Ex. 17)

'he will give his angels charge of you, to guard you,' and Psalm 91:11-12, 2 Rabbis Argue!

11 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against **A STONE**.'" Satan Knows Bible!

Jesus Refuses A False Leap Of Faith

12 And Jesus answered him, "It is said, No Presumption, No Forcing God Through Risk

'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" = put God to the test, Exodus 17:1-17, Deut. 6:16

3) Jesus Decides About Submission And Initiative: Humility/Reverence

1') w.13-15 CONCLUSION: HOLY SPIRIT, GALILEE, DEVIL, TEMPTATION.

Jesus Wins By Humble Faith, Staunch Allegiance, Our Champion

13 And when the **DEVIL** had ended every **TEMPTATION**, and/ Gk. kai (4x), Best Shot! Jesus Character Confirmed

he departed from him until and opportune time. [Time], 22:3, 6, 28, 32, 53, Luke 4:31-44 Exorcisms

14a And Jesus returned in the **POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** into **GALILEE**, Not Depleted, Liberation Begins

b and a report concerning him went through all the surrounding country. Jesus Emerges Tested In Virtue, Goes Public!

15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. Lk. 11:20, Acts 10:38, Kingdoms In Perpetual Conflict

¹ Parallel to Matt. 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13; italicized portions show where Luke differs from Matthew. This story shows how Jesus gained spiritual authority over the Evil One in private so that he might plunder his goods (free people) in public. It encourages us to know that Jesus was tested and that Scripture and the Holy Spirit are our defense as well. It is multiply attested. See Ephesians 6:11ff. for a parallel treatment from Paul.

A Brief Treatment Of Luke 4:1-15

This is the next unit in Luke's treatment of Jesus' pre-public career (1:1-4:30) which at each stage is set in parallel to John the Baptist. As John was *in the wilderness* where he received *the word of God* (3:2b); Jesus is now *in the wilderness* where he speaks God's words to the devil. Where both Adam in the garden and Israel in the wilderness failed, Jesus' succeeds. One has been tested and found worthy, Jesus alone! He now has full, proven credentials to begin his public work of kingdom proclamation and liberation. Jesus is Son of God by the Spirit from conception (2:1-21), announced as such and anointed with the Spirit at his baptism (3:1-22); the resume of his Sonship is given in the genealogy (3:23-38), and his faithful character as loyal Son is revealed in his testing by the Evil One (4:1-15). Jesus is the real deal. His great work is the undoing of Adam's sin. Each of his successes also mirrors one of the failures of Israel in their forty year desert wandering (hunger [Ex. 16], idolatry [Ex. 32], presumption [Ex. 17]).

The unit has a 5:1 concentric pattern (1-2-3'-2'-1') pattern with multiple inclusions as a frame: *full of the Holy Spirit, Jordan, Spirit, tempted, devil* (vv.1-2) // *devil, temptation, power of the Holy Spirit, Galilee* (vv.13-15). A narrative frame (1. vv.1-2 // 1' vv.13-15) surrounds a dialogic core (2-3-2') with time references at the start (*forty days*, v.1), middle (*moment of time*, v.5) and end (*opportune time*, v.13b). Paratactic construction (4 successive uses of *and/kai*) marks the frames (1//1'). Note that the word *stone* is found in 2 // 2'. Luke's central temptation is idolatry (3. vv.5-8), i.e. to give ultimacy to other than God for the sake of convenience. Some scholars see the unit as 4:1-13; Luke's evidence suggests 4:1-15.

Jesus is, in the later language of the church, the visible vehicle of the Trinity. The sending of the Son with the Spirit precedes the sending of the Spirit by the Son at Pentecost. His full humanity is submitted to the Father's will and suffused with the Spirit. Radical dependence and the inspiration of immediate guidance are his mode of operations (see John 5:19-30 for a parallel treatment). Jesus does not quickly enter public ministry after baptism but is led by the Spirit into the Judean wilds for a long fast and continuous testing. The Spirit is for empowerment, not religious entertainment. The verbs in v.2a indicate that the leading of the Spirit and the temptation are both continuous, one for and other against Jesus as the locus of God's purpose in the world. The fast was from food but not water, and at the end of the forty days pains indicating the onset of starvation grew sharp. It was at his physical weakest that Satan's assault reached peak intensity. The question is, Will Jesus remain submitted? Or, Will he cave?

The devil does not so much question his status as Son as two times presume it as the basis of appeal (vv.3, 9). A rounded desert stone looks a lot like a loaf of warm bread. So the question is, Under great physical stress, will he seek to act apart from his Father's command and the Spirit's empowerment? Must he solve his own problem? Is he an independent agent or a dependent one? His answer, his first thrust with the sword of the Spirit, is Deut. 8:3a, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" In other words, "My life and welfare depend on God, not myself; I will not eat until released to do so." All Jesus' normal appetites and passions are fully surrendered; he has the virtue self-control.

The second round is visionary which demonstrates that the Evil One has access to the theater of the imagination. The battle is between our ears, and the sinless Jesus hears the voice of the devil. The new appeal is to take a short cut, "Grab for the gold now. Surely this is your right as the privileged Son?" Satan is after a change of command on the turf he temporarily inherited through Adam's treason. But Jesus' devotion is exclusive. Only God is worthy of ultimate loyalty and service (Deut. 6:13-15). Jesus does not argue but again appeals to Scripture. The Son of God deploys the Word of God by the Spirit of God.

The third round is the temptation of presumption, and here the foe takes a page from Jesus' play book and quotes Ps. 91:11-12. If David was protected from stubbing his toe, surely you can *take a leap of faith*? But Jesus, who knows Scripture can be twisted, appeals to Deut. 6:16 that God's protection is not to be presumed on or gambled with. Jesus has taken his enemy's best shots and prevailed. The devil then withdraws and re-figures his strategy. The fruit of the testing is revealed in the success of the public ministry as it begins (vv.14-15). Private victory leads to public benefit for others. He is a blessing.

A NECESSARY ENGAGEMENT

“... and he was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness...
And the devil led him up....”

Jesus is subject to spiritual pressure from two opposing directions.

L U K E 4 : 2 a, 5 a

Did you know that for the first time in history there’s not a Protestant on the Supreme Court?² Justice Stevens, retired in 2010, was the last one of us. Before Justice Antonin Scalia died a year ago, there were six Roman Catholics on the bench: Chief Justice John Roberts, Justices Antonin Scalia, Anthony Kennedy, Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, and Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Now if you are a conspiracy theorist, this is rich material on which to speculate about some secret cabal loyal to the Pope pulling strings behind the scenes. Or, you could notice, demographically, that the Northeast Corridor of the U.S., a place of outsized national influence, is dense with Catholics because of late 19th and early 20th century immigration. Or, to my mind more promising, you might research Catholic higher ed and discover that their core curricula still contains substantive work in *philosophy*- what is true and proven, in *logic*- what is rational and consistent, in *rhetoric*- how to communicate, and in *theology*- how it squares with what we know of God through divine revelation and natural law, all of which are critical skills for lawyering at the highest levels in a nation that claims our basic rights are God-given. And when you add to that the weight of Catholic social teaching– even when not followed, their influence is considerable, and I for one am grateful. Going to Mass most Sundays is deeply formative, as is synagogue for the three Jews that complete the nine. Trump’s nominee Neil Gorsuch is Episcopal, but attended Catholic schools, so there!

² My first notice of this was Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 41, “The current U.S. Supreme Court is composed of six Catholics and three Jews.”

My read is that we Protestants have been quietly displaced simply because we've been out-educated in the core disciplines that allow a man or woman to rise to this high level of jurisprudence. These are serious people doing serious work; they shape the nation and the culture by calling balls and strikes on what is and is not a legitimate extension of the Constitution because the law shapes the land. We fight about them and their nominations precisely because they are so important. They all know the law and its history of precedent, but what is their philosophy, and how does it shape the paper trail? It's called vetting.

All this to say that once you're robed, and the term is for life— or until retirement, you can say pretty much what you think— with some discretion of course, and that was surely true of Justice Scalia who in 2013 answered questions put to him by Jennifer Senior of *New York Magazine*.³ After mentioning his belief in a real heaven and hell, he interjected, "I even believe in the Devil." The interview continued with Senior saying— no doubt with eyebrows raised, "You do?"

"Of course! Yeah, he's a real person"

"Have you seen evidence of the Devil lately?"

"You know, it is curious. In the Gospels, the Devil is doing all sorts of things. He's making pigs run off cliffs, he's possessing people and whatnot. And that doesn't happen very much anymore ... It's because he's smart."

"So what's he doing now?" she inquired.

"What he's doing now is getting people not to believe in him or in God. He's much more successful that way ... I mean, c'mon, that's the explanation for why there's not demonic possession all over the place. That always puzzled me. What happened to the Devil, you know? He used to be all over the place. He used to be all over the New Testament. What happened to him? He got wilier."

"Isn't it terribly frightening to believe in the Devil?" she asked.

"You're looking at me as though I'm weird. My God! Are you so out of touch with most of America, most of which believes in the Devil? I mean, Jesus Christ believed in the Devil! It's in the Gospels! You travel in circles that are so, so removed from mainstream America that you are appalled anybody would believe in the Devil! Most of mankind has believed in the Devil, for all of

³ "In Conversation," nymag.com/news/features/antonin-scalia-2013-10.

history. Many more intelligent people than you or me have believed in the Devil.” Scalia agrees with Norman Mailer, the gritty American novelist who put it this way, “If you don't believe in God and the Devil, I wouldn't say you're crazy, but you're intellectually malnourished.”⁴

Now many thoughtful people reject the idea and reality of the *Devil*, or *Satan*, or the *Evil One*— he has several names in the New Testament— for good reason. It can be a block to moral responsibility for those who seriously claim what Flip Wilson made fun of, “The devil made me do it.” No; whatever the influence, we remain accountable. Second, across history those who name a personal focus of evil may be prone to demonize opponents and thus dehumanize them. Some find the pictures and iconography— horns, red suits, lusty grin and pitchfork, the Halloween devil of pop culture— as nothing but silly and trivial, and I agree. *Medieval* is the term they often employ as a slur, implying some long surpassed *Dark Ages* when everyone was superstitious but not now, not in these enlightened times. Others give him no purchase because in the cast of characters that make up the drama of life, he’s just not in the troupe and irrelevant. They side with those of a flat, secular world view without God or angels or spiritual depth and see no reason for this level of explanation; the supernatural is absent. Some say it answers the question of evil much too simply. Others that it’s a tool parents and clergy use to frighten people and keep them morally in line. Some claim it creates a permanent dualism, an eternal standoff between good and evil as if they were equals in an unending battle, which they are not. All of these, when examined, have merit and deserve answers. But I find none of them convincing for several reasons.

First, I confess that Jesus is God the Son among us, and if he acknowledged the Evil One and fought him in daily combat for the sake of enslaved people— and was, I might add, highly successful as an exorcist and demon duster— maybe he sees more than we do?⁵ Jesus was not a physicist or

⁴ Gregory Kirschling, “Norman Mailer: our last interview,” ew.com/article/2007/11/13/norman-mailer-our-last-interview.

⁵ For the current consensus, see Darrell Bock, editor, *Who Was Jesus?* (New York, NY: Howard Books, 2012), Chapter 6, “Jesus And Exorcism,” 79-92.

chemist and a man of his time on many matters that are irrelevant to divine revelation, but within the limits of the incarnation, what he believed about God, about people, and about the forces arrayed against us in the powers of sin and evil and death is to me binding on the Christian conscience. Dare any Christian say on such a central matter, “I know better than he.” Yet some do, and some are bishops and pastors trained in our schools. Never in my forty years has the issue been addressed at a district or conference gathering, and if you raise it as an option, you’ll be pushed the sidelines of respectability. It’s not fashionable to acknowledge the dark side of the supernatural, which shows how deeply we’ve been secularized and how much we’ve traded in to be thought modern and *with it*. But among friends, pastors will tell a different story of encounters that left them chilled and shaken. I myself have several.

The central stream of church teaching affirms Satan as a archangel fallen into rebellion, not to be *believed in* but *believed against*, not to be trusted but utterly resisted. As in our second baptismal vow “... to resist *evil*, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.” The *devil* is named in our *Confession of Faith* as an enemy;⁶ it and its parallel term *Satan* are found throughout *The Standard Sermons of John Wesley*⁷ and named in our first baptismal promise as *the spiritual forces of wickedness*; our hymnal– our sung theology– is full of references. And if we, with a high hand of supposed sophistication– strike the Evil One from the cast of characters, we change the script of the story, carve out whole sections of Scripture and find ourselves missing one of the layers of explanation we need to understand our world. To make too much of him is an error, but to make him into nothing, into a joke to be dismissed– as is our liberal Methodist bias– is to distort the faith and render our people intellectually and morally defenseless, and that- in my read– is

⁶ U.M Confession of Faith, Article XI on *Sanctification and Christian Perfection* closes with, “The Christian must continue on guard against spiritual pride and seek to gain victory over every temptation to sin. He must respond wholly to the will of God so that sin will lose its power over him; and the world, the flesh, and *the devil* are put under his feet. Thus he rules over *these enemies* with watchfulness through the power of the Holy Spirit” (*B.O.D 2016: 75*).

⁷ See, e.g., Sermon 42, “Satan’s Devices,” www.gbvm.org.

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pastoral malpractice.⁸ They take blows and have no idea where they come from or how to punch back as Jesus did with fasting and Scripture and obedience.

So where did the story come from? Some say the early church wrote it, and I am willing to acknowledge that in its current form, it bears the imprint of Luke's style, as the Matthew version bears the mark of his hand. But it's the same story, a tune sung in two keys. But the bones of the story, I am convinced, come from Jesus. The reason being that such a test was required of him before he went public with his preaching and enactment of his Father's dynamic kingdom. What he was to offer in public must be first secured in private combat. He must run the gauntlet, cross the minefield, win and take the keys. Alone. Fasting. Focused, and in direct conversation with Satan, the mode and pressure of which we cannot imagine. A pure, sinless soul facing off with one thoroughly corrupted and hostile, poking at him where most vulnerable: his empty belly, his future destiny, his trust in the Father. That three conversations are recorded is indicative of the interpersonal nature of the interrogation. That Jesus responded not with argument but Scripture is central. His steadfast intention is to remain dependent on the will of the Father and the guidance of the Spirit, not to go independent with a quick meal or a shortcut to rule or a test of God's protection. And in faithfulness he is proven; he'd rather suffer than disobey his call or distrust his Sender. And it is with this heavyweight title in hand that he emerges in the power of the Spirit to begin the great liberation. I need a Hero, a Defender, a Rescuer, a Savior. I have one; it is this Jesus!

From 1886 to 1964 when it was suppressed, each Roman Catholic low mass included the following prayer, "Saint Michael Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil; may God rebuke him, we humbly pray; and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl through the world seeking the ruin of souls." Would that we had such prayers!

⁸ The classic Lewis quote is, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight," azquotes.com/author/8805-C_S_Lewis/tag/devil.

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“Jesus Meets His Foe”

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(Ash Wednesday)

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JESUS MEETS HIS FOE

*“And when the devil had ended every temptation,
he departed until an opportune time.”*

Why vigilance, even in the doldrums, is always necessary.

L U K E 4 : 1 3

Dr. Walter Wink, until his death in 2012, was an innovative biblical scholar, pastor, and teacher, and I’ve read many of his books with profit, including his trilogy on *The Powers*, which was his way of naming the demonic level of human experience. In his chapter in the book *Understanding Spiritual Warfare: Four Views*, he make a startling claim and backs it with first person report of a friend. And here’s the statement, “Beliefs about Satan are a matter of debate, but the experience of Satan is a brute and terrifying fact.” And then the story:

“A couple dear to us lost their ten-year-old son to cancer after an heroic, utterly devastating nine-month fight. Some time after the shock they went to the beach for restoration. One night, on the ninth floor of the hotel, the husband had a dream: He was standing by a great bog. He knew it was his own inner evil and that he could not run from it, so he just jumped in. With that he woke up. As he lay there at two o’clock in the morning, a voice said to him, ‘Why don’t you go to the balcony and jump?’

My friend said no, thinking he must be still dreaming.

But the voice insisted, ‘Go ahead, you won’t hurt yourself. You’ll land in the trees; they’ll break your fall.’

He got up, went to the bathroom, splashed water in his face, trying to break out of the dream. He went back and sat on the edge of the bed. The voice assailed him again, ‘You can jump in the swimming pool.’

‘No, I’d never make it, and anyway, the nearest part is the shallow end.’

‘But if you jumped, you would see your son.’ At that moment a vision of his dead son seemed to hang in the room.

For the first time the idea of jumping became appealing. He

resisted, and the voice began to scream, ‘Jump! Jump! Jump!’ relentlessly. Then it got very quiet, ‘Why don’t you just go out and sit on the balcony?’ This went on for more than two hours. Finally, he woke his wife and asked her to hold him. The moment she did, the assault ceased.”⁹

There are several angles from which to understand such a report; the one we would most quickly employ is the medical and psychiatric. The trauma of the death of a child, the adrenal depletion it caused, the onset of depression, a psychotic episode with suicidal ideation. That is a good and necessary response. Should I hear such a story, which I have on occasion, my first move is to get the person to a medical or mental health professional. And valid as it is, it misses something that Jesus and the New Testament give us language for, and that is the vocabulary of spiritual testing and spiritual warfare with *evil*, if all you can muster is the noun, or with the *Evil One*, if your world view allows you to invoke a personal source– which mine does.

Life puts all sorts of pressures on people, and some of them we are very good at naming and addressing, but there are pressures of another kind we moderns are not so good at naming and addressing, and in this case I literally mean speaking to. As modern western Christians, ours is basically a world view with two levels: a *God-and-heaven* level above– which is invisible and often ignored, and an *us-and-our-world-level*– which is visible and consuming. But our binary view excludes an entire third layer between the two that is found on nearly every page of Scripture and in the stories of people across the ages, if you take time to read and to listen. Scholars call this *the excluded middle*, and it is a layer of angelic activity, both good and evil that is highly interactive.¹⁰ And if the story of Jesus’ desert stand off with the devil is read through our conventional two-level lenses, we bring in terms like *myth* and *legend* and *folklore* and aim at a psychological reading, simply because we do not give the

⁹ James K. Bielby and Paul Rhodes Eddy, editors, *Understanding Spiritual Warfare: Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), 59.

¹⁰ The classic treatment is Paul Hiebert, “Flaw Of The Excluded Middle,” *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1, January 1982.

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status of being real to the devil. He's a symbol, not personal. It's all about Jesus inner vocational struggle, or— as we love to say, “It's all in his head.”

But, if we read the story through tri-focal lenses that include *the excluded middle*, the realm of angelic interaction, we come closer to how Luke and Jesus before him understood the mysterious event. And what I am after, as a historian and Jesus follower, and pastor, is to get as close as I can to how the story was first heard and understood. There was more than one person in the desert, though they were of two different orders of creation: one human and pure and good and sinless and uncorrupted— Jesus, God the Son in flesh; the other angelic and full corrupted, evil and malicious, *diabolos*, the devil, Satan, a high-ranking angel who went sour and now serves as a node and nexus for all that is evil in our world. And he, or one of his little friends, was on the ninth floor of the hotel the night the voices began with Dr. Wink's friend.

After threes decade of Nazareth obscurity the word comes, “Now is the time,” so Jesus, an oldest son, defies custom to leave family and village and all he knows to walk south to the Judean desert and Jordan River where Cousin John is holding outdoor revival meetings. The altar call is to be washed in the waters, and for Jews that meant a *do-over*, as if they'd just recently come out of Egypt and were not yet in the promised land. A do-over, a dramatic act of repentance, a washing on the outside that may reach the heart. And so the Spirit says to the Son, “Get in the line,” and he does. But then, as soon as he's dripping wet, phenomena from the other realm intrude, and the gospels fudge a bit on who got in on the display as the heavens ripped open, a voice was heard, and the Spirit descended like a fluttering dove upon him. Three signs, three interlaced meanings: 1) Jesus lives under an open heaven as the location of divine revelation; 2) he is uniquely related to God as Son, as personal Agent; 3) he is energized and led by God the Holy Spirit. And, though the church did not yet have the precise language, it's a Trinitarian moment. The Father is now ready to begin Messianic ground operations in an anointed agent. But before he can go public, a private issue must be settled. Before Jesus can reclaim the playground, he must deal with the schoolyard bully. Life's been pretty secluded till now, but this is the big time. Can Jesus take the heat? Can he pass through the fires un-singed? Can the innocent one, the pure one, go toe-to-toe with Evil Incarnate and not be compromised? The Son must be tested. And so his first

appointment is not with the masses but alone in the dry, desert wastes with the one who loves to hurt and wound and twist and destroy all that is good and pure and innocent. And it is the Spirit who leads Jesus there for forty days of trials. God, it seems, is picking a fight with a squatter, the one to whom Adam surrendered the family deeds. Jesus brought no food with him. He trusted the Spirit to sustain him, and it was a very long fast, through not from water— which would have been humanly and medically impossible, “...and when the days were ended, he was hungry,” not thirsty. Now whether the three trials were distributed across forty or as a final assault at the end, we don’t know. Luke reports that the pressure was continuous, and from two opposing sources: the continuous leading of the Spirit to one end, the continuous testing of the Devil to another, so Jesus is not on a battleground; he is the battleground! And we all know the feeling, the pull and tug, though at a much-reduced intensity because we are already compromised by sin and by quite a few losses in the battle.

I know my own voice— outer and inner, my wife’s voice— even when she’s not around, as in, “Don’t throw away that Coke can; it’s not good for the environment; we recycle!” and that was in Kenya in October, so I carried the can with me till I found a depository, and if someone had asked why, the honest reply would have been, “There’s a female voice in my head! Can you hear it?” She’s tough, and for that I’m a better man! I know the voice of others as well, including the voice of the Evil One and his helpers and the voice of Jesus and his helpers. They each, I have learned, have a different quality about them.

Jesus knew the voice, and the first pathway was his aching belly, a long denied physical appetite, “After all, since you’re God’s Sod, use your delegated authority to turn the round stone at your feet to a loaf of warm, fresh bread. They look a lot alike to your dreary eyes, don’t they? Can you smell it? Is your mouth watering? Just imagine it. Just take the initiative. Be a man!”

Yes, it hurts to be so hungry. But it’s about something deeper than food or even survival. “Will I trust all my needs to the will of the Father and the leading of the Spirit, or will I act on my own as an independent? No, and the reason is found in our Book, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” Jesus would rather die than disobey, a commitment that will be tested again one Friday. And how easy for us to fall and fail in this realm: food, addictions, indulgences, a life

of satisfying impulses rather than letting God train us in their proper enjoyment.

Now when I say these three were visionary experiences, I don't mean they were hallucinations in the negative sense, indicating insanity, only that they involved travel without his ever changing locations, and the human capacity for such is imagination, the theater of the mind. *In a moment of time* says Luke, in a flash, Jesus viewed all the world and all its riches. And after a preview of the properties, the devil made his sales pitch, "It's all mine and can be all yours, if only you will bow the head and knee and heart to me. Let me lead you rather the Spirit. So much faster. After all, aren't you come to reclaim a kingdom? All free from me, except for a single gesture." Here Satan— in a classic overreach— tips his hand because what he most wants is to steal glory and loyalty from God. Rather than reason with the insanity of evil, Jesus again uses God's Word as his weapon, "No, I worship and serve another, not you." So, if you are one of the ambitious who *want it all*, be careful because he knows.

The third is not located in the desert where the Hebrews were tested and failed or high above the world but in God's city at a pinnacle of the temple with a drop off of five hundred feet to the Valley Kidron below, and it is not— as some say— an appeal the crowds, because none are present. If Jesus quotes the Book, then so will his foe, in a lesser to greater argument. King David's feet and toes had angelic protection, why not his later, greater Son? "Take a leap of faith." Do you see the pattern? Bread *now*. Rule *now*. Protection *now*. Or, as the grieving father on the ninth floor heard, "Jump! Jump! Jump!" Temptation is always *Now*; obedience is always trust and patience. God leads; the Spirit is present; sometimes it hurts, but trust and obey is worth it. "No, for the third time, my trust is not about forcing God to prove himself." And that was it, at least for the present. Jesus would have a wonderful run of freeing captives after besting their jailer, nearly three years. But the voice would return soon enough, and this time Jesus would die! What will you do next time you hear the voice?
