

14 February 2016
Lent 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Love of God For You”

Text: Luke 4:1-13 (Romans 10:8b-13)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

On this Valentine’s Day, it is good to consider the question: How does God show His love for you? Don’t expect flowers or chocolates or anything else of this world . . . *For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son* (John 3:16).

This past week, in Morning Prayer, we read what an early church theologian named Hilary of Poitiers said about this. Hilary said:

God, who loved the world, gave His only-begotten Son as a manifest token of His love. If the evidence of His love is this, that He bestowed a creature upon creatures, gave a worldly being on the world’s behalf, granted one raised up from nothing for the redemption of objects equally raised up from nothing, this cheap and petty sacrifice is a poor assurance of His favor toward us. Gifts of price are the evidence of affection, the greatness of the surrender of the greatness of the love. God, who loved the world, gave not an adopted Son, but His own, His only-begotten Son. . . . Herein is the proof of His love and affection . . .

So it is not things of this world and life that are signs of God’s favor. It is not wealth or health or whatever of this world you’ve been praying for, that, if God really loves you, you’ll receive. No. You have been given something far greater than any of that which so easily comes and goes. The Father gave His only Son for you. The Son left His Father and became flesh for you. For poor you, sinful you, rebellious you. Because He loves you. Simply because He wants you to be with Him forever.

And today, we hear of that Son, Jesus, here for you, and in love, fighting for you. He is in the wilderness, where there is no food, no flowers, no nothing. It is the anti-Eden, the place of barrenness, dryness, and death. It is our place. God did not create the wilderness. The wilderness is the place we have made . . . because of our sin. The stripping away of God’s good gifts and creation. The place of hunger and thirst . . . *and evil.*

So that’s where Jesus is for you. He does not happen there by chance. He was led there, by the Spirit. Still - literally! - wet behind the ears from the water of His baptism, He is led out to begin what He has come to do. He enters the battlefield, to confront the evil

one; to be tempted. He fasts 40 days and 40 nights and - as Luke so casually remarks - *he was hungry*. And so satan pounces . . .

If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.

It seems like such a little thing, doesn't it? But maybe it is the littlest things that are the largest temptations and the greatest dangers. The things that seem inconsequential. The things no one else notices. The things we can so easily do and get away with. The things that aren't the really big sins at all . . . that are just, well, like this. Little words, little disobedience, little taking, little glances, little forays to forbidden fruit . . .

But satan knows how deadly all sin is, even the sins we think just a part of life. And Jesus knows it, too. There are no little sins with God. No "it doesn't matter" sins. No harmless sins. The things of this world that we hunger and thirst for lead us away from God. And so as deadly as that forbidden fruit was in the Garden to Adam and Eve, so deadly is this to Jesus. And if Jesus, then to us. For if He falls, we fall. If He fails, there is no hope for us. Such a little thing . . . but with such big consequences.

But Jesus hungers and thirsts not for the things of this world, as we. He hungers and thirsts for righteousness (Matthew 5:6). The righteousness of God and your righteousness. So this little temptation is met by a strong rejection. *It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'* Life is given and sustained *by God*.

Well, undaunted - for satan does not easily daunt - *he takes Jesus and shows Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time*. What does that mean? What exactly did he show Jesus? The magnificent palaces of old? The glory of Rome? But maybe *all the kingdoms of the world* also include the big cities of today, the advances of technology, the seven wonders of both the ancient and modern worlds . . .

Actually, I don't think it was any of that. For none of that matters to Jesus. None of that impresses the one who came down from the glory of heaven, where the streets are paved with gold and the foundations are precious stones and there are myriad upon myriad of angels. All that would simply bring a yawn to Jesus.

But what would grab Jesus' attention are *all the people* in all the kingdoms of the world. All the people He came to save. All those poor people out there, oppressed by sin and evil, bent low under heavy burdens, struggling, crying, suffering. It's you, satan shows Jesus. . . . So trade. You *worship me* and I'll let them go.

He's lying, of course. If satan can take down Jesus, take down God in the flesh, all will be his! . . . There's a kernel of truth, though. Jesus did come to trade - but not by giving Himself into satan's hands and plans, but by giving Himself into His Father's hands, on the cross. By taking your sin and giving you His forgiveness. By taking your death and

giving you His life. By taking your hell and giving you His kingdom. And by doing so, winning all for His Father.

You see, the freedom satan promises is just slavery to sin in disguise. Better is to be a child of God and under His care. So no, satan; no deal. ***You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.***

Well played, Jesus! Seeing through those temptations . . . but let's see if your so-called Father has the same dedication to you as you seem to have to Him. ***Throw yourself down from here, from the pinnacle of the Temple.*** Show me this Father you trust. Show me this God you serve. Show me how much He loves you . . . *if* He'll really send His angels . . . *if* He'll really protect you. As I look around, I don't see so much of that. I see so much misery and pain and suffering. Some God! Show me! . . . Or are you afraid? Maybe He'll let you down . . . maybe you have some doubts after all, hmm?

Show me. How often have those same words come from our lips, our hearts, our minds? God, your Word isn't good enough - show me. God, I'm not sure - show me. God, all I see is . . . *show me* that you love me.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son . . .

Jesus in the manger. Jesus in the wilderness. Jesus under the whip. Jesus on the cross. Jesus in the tomb. There's your proof. And then His resurrection, Jesus' ascension, the proof that He has defeated sin, satan, death, and hell **for you**. And now Jesus in His Word, His Baptism, His Absolution, His Body and Blood, where He is, here and now, to give that victory to you. He has shown you . . . He is showing you . . .

That He is the Bridegroom who with perfect love, laid down His life for you, His Bride. That He is the one who fights for you - not against you; who fights for you, and won. And as Paul said: ***everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame . . . everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*** Will receive His victory.

You shall not put the Lord your God to the test. Jesus' rebuke to satan is our assurance. You don't need to put God to the test! He has already done it all for you.

And Jesus is victorious. And the devil departed from him until an opportune time. Satan's not done. This isn't over, Jesus. I'll be back, he says. And he was, when Jesus was in another wilderness, or sorts - hanging on the cross, there forsaken and alone. And satan hissed at Him again the same questioning words, this time through the very people He came to save; through the people mocking Him: if you are the Son of God . . . save yourself . . . prove it . . . But there, too, Jesus is faithful and dedicated, strong and steadfast. Resisting every last temptation, and winning. He would come down from the

cross. He would stay and die to atone for your sin, rise to conquer the death that conquers you, and with both, strip satan of his weapons against you.

Yet *still* satan's not done. For if he cannot have Jesus, he wants you. So now, he's after you. Lying, deceiving, tempting, luring, making evil look good and good look evil, trying to get you to doubt God's love for you . . . And as you know, he's good at his job. Just look around, at the havoc in the world. Just look at the trouble in your own heart.

How will you respond? How do you? Is it with God's Word, as Jesus did? That's certainly a good thing, and as Christians you do. You resist temptations. You try to do what's right and best. I've seen you.

But you've also fallen. Lots. You know it. Failing to do what you should. Doing what you know you should not. Questioning God, doubting His love. Satan has won battles against you, hasn't he? As you sometimes sin deliberately, sometimes impulsively, sometimes accidentally, sometimes unknowingly, and sometimes quite viciously. The struggle goes on, in the wilderness of this world and life.

So how good to know, as we heard today, that we're not alone. And that we don't just have fellow sinners to huddle together with and commiserate with. **But that we have the victorious Son of God with us.** There He is. Here He is. For you. To fight for you even today, putting down sin and satan with His forgiveness and Spirit. Giving to you here the medicine and life you need. Putting His very Body and Blood into you to cleanse you and strengthen you for the fight. And how angry that makes satan! How unfair, he says! That he can't just fight you on his own terms, and you with your own strength. You can try if you want. It's what he wants. But the outcome won't be good. *On earth is not his equal.*

Better is to take refuge in *the Mighty Fortress. The Valiant One who came to fight for us. The One whose by our side upon the plain, with His good gifts and Spirit. And then, though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill, they cannot overpower us.* For in Him, *our victory has been won* (LSB #656).

That's the love Jesus has for you. The greatest valentine of all time, and the best you'll ever receive. And He's here to give to you today. So come, let's tick off satan a bit more now, as our Lord turns not stones into bread, as satan wanted, but bread and wine into His Body and Blood, as satan hates! That as we continue in the struggle, we receive Him, His victory, and His satan-putting-down life. For here, with Jesus, we win.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.