

**St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Associate Rector

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

***"This is a Test..."***

This year would have been my 40<sup>th</sup> year in broadcasting – having started all the way back in the “dark ages” of 1971. Oh, way back then we played records, remember records? They might sometimes skip. (That’s another story for another day) Back then – by law, you were required to perform regularly scheduled EBS tests – the “Emergency Broadcast System” at different times of the day or night. They have since been renamed “Emergency Alert System.” They were especially vital during the “Cold War.” How many of you remember hearing this? *"This is a test of the Emergency Broadcast System. The broadcasters of your area in voluntary cooperation with the FCC and other authorities have developed this system to keep you informed in the event of an emergency. This is only a test!"* Then an ear piercing dual tone would be heard (for what seemed like forever) followed by: *"If this had been an actual emergency, you would have been instructed to tune to one of the broadcast stations in your area for news and other important information. This concludes this test of the Emergency Broadcast System."* Regular programming could then resume and there was a sigh of relief. Heaven forbid we would not be ready in the event of a real disaster – and so we were tested - regularly.

The people of God - the Israelites – coming out of slavery in Egypt, experienced testing in the wilderness for forty years; Jesus, the Son of God, experienced testing in the wilderness for forty days and nights. Jesus exhibits the faithful obedience of the Son to the Father where Israel failed miserably. The things offered to Jesus – bread, safety, and the kingdoms of this world— are rightfully His by virtue of His Sonship and Messianic identity. Jesus is called to be obedient to the Father, not only as Son but also as a Servant. Jesus is to be a model of obedience to the will of the Father with the immense pressure of severe testing and at the cost of self-denial – the emptying of Himself – *“taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.”* (Philippians 2:7) He would express His Messianic identity to the world, only in agreement with the will of the Father.

Jesus’ obedience to God the Father is accomplished, through humility, service, and suffering. Let me tell you - that is true greatness! In fulfilling His commission by obedience to the will of the Father, Jesus demonstrates the relevance of the first great commandment from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Remember just 2 weeks ago we recalled the Shema? *“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might”* Jesus in His life and His works exhibits His submission to it. He is a living example of how Christians can live as sons and daughters of God, in full obedience to the will of God, including life’s difficulties and tests. Those tests will not be the same as those faced by Jesus, which have to do with His identity as the Son of God and His mission of obedience – even to death – death on the cross. Our tests will be similar in that as Christians we are called to self-sacrifice, and obedience to the will of the Father. We are called to believe – and accept the freedom which Christ obtained for us on the cross – and learn to not only forgive others who wrong us – but to finally forgive ourselves. We have a most wonderful model to follow, for as Hebrews 4:15 tells us: *“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”*

Have you noticed that there is a distinct pattern here? One that requires preparation and obedience to God’s will!

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- Noah and his family spent 40 days in the Ark – while the rest of mankind paid the price for their disobedience.
- Moses spent 40 days of preparation in the wilderness: Exodus 34:28 tells us that *“he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.”*
- Elijah spent 40 days and nights in solitude also: as we can read in 1 Kings 19:8 *“So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.”*
- The Israelites were to spend 40 days – but because of their disobedience they wandered for 40 years: Deuteronomy 8:2-3 *“You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, **testing you**, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. “He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.”*

There is an even deeper correlation within Holy Scripture to this account of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. I want to suggest to you a remarkable relationship between the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden and the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness of the Negev. I want you to listen to these words from Genesis 3:1 *“Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’”* The serpent questioned the woman as to God’s very own command and the fruit of the tree. In Matthew 4:3 he shows his ugly head again! *“And the tempter came and said to Him, **“If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”*** This first temptation is in direct apposition to what Jesus had just heard when He came up out of the Jordan. Matthew 3:17 *“and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”* The enemy uses that moment as a springboard – asking *“If You are the Son of God...”* **do something spectacular!**

A second temptation came in Genesis 3:4 *“The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die!”* The enemy was standing against God’s own words – and in essence calling God a liar – that she would not suffer death from doing her own will. The tempter uses a similar tact with Jesus in the Negev; in Matthew 4:6 saying to Jesus, *“If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning You’; and ‘On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.’”* He uses God’s own Word from Psalm 91 to tempt Jesus – that He would not be injured – so why not “just do it!

And then a third time Satan had something to say: in Genesis 3:5 he told the woman *“For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”* He was offering something that he did not own – and in Matthew 4:8-9 *“Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.”*

**Each time Jesus is tempted He answers with the Word of God – the Sword of the Spirit**, trusting completely in the Father and to serving Him only. His first response was from Deuteronomy 8:3 which we heard a little earlier: *“man does not live by bread alone, but man*

*lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.*” The second temptation Jesus responds again from Deuteronomy 6:16 *“You shall not put the LORD your God to the test!”* Lastly – when Jesus was offered the kingdoms of the world, He had had enough from the tempter – and He called him by name saying *“Go Satan!”* Jesus then referred back to Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20 when He said *“YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.”* (Matthew 4:10) Jesus had just come through the waters of baptism – like the Israelites had come out of the waters of the Red Sea. He now was facing the equivalent of their 40 years in His 40 days and nights, meeting the enemy head on – “face to face!”

### **Did you ever notice that opportunity knocks only once, but temptation bangs on the door constantly?**

I was reading a teaching on the subject of temptation by a Pastor named Tim Zingale. I want to share with you his interpretation of temptations. He says that: “Temptation is the process of TESTING us to see if we’re for real... It’s a battle between the Spirit & the flesh; the results will indicate if we’re closer to heaven or if we’re closer to earth... Temptations are necessary... they teach us several things...

- They aren’t there to weaken us, they’re there to make us stronger
- They aren’t there to make us bad, they’re there to make us better
- They aren’t there as a penalty, they’re there as a privilege to prove ourselves to God
- They’re there to strengthen us for God’s purpose”

The Apostle James has quite a bit to say about being put to the test: *“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”* (James 1:2-4) He later writes in that same chapter: *“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”* (James 1:12-13) God is not setting a trap for you, waiting for you to slip up – instead, He is ready to catch you when you fall, and to hold on to you, to embrace you, to save you!

When Jesus refused to go the way of the tempter – instead He was embracing the way of the cross. The temptations, the taunts, were meant to stop Him from carrying out God’s calling on His life – to redeem Israel and to redeem the world. Our temptations that we all face might be very different from the ones Jesus endured – but they have the same point – the enemy is trying to distract us from serving God. God has a calling on each one of our lives and the enemy will stop at nothing to try and throw the kitchen sink at us – to test us and to distract us from God’s plan for our lives. Like Jesus – we must use the Holy Word of God – the Sword of the Spirit to fight back and resist the trials of the tempter. We would do very well to follow the words of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians: *“Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the*

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*sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*” (Ephesians 6:13-17) My brothers and sisters, during these 40 days of Lent and beyond, keep your eyes on God, putting your whole trust in Him. When the enemy whispers in your ear – simply tell Him “**in the Name of Jesus – No!**”