**Luke 4:1-13 March 6, 2022**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson Luke chapter 4:1-13 here re-reading these words. “The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

ei uious ei tou theou. These Greek words are translated “If You are the Son of God”. These are the words that Satan uses twice in tempting Jesus in the wilderness. And while we hear them as just “If” in English in the Greek we get to hear the ei…ei…That annoying little ei, “If you are who you say you are” “If you can do anything” “If You have the power to do this” and so on. Imagine for a second the constant barrage of Greek eis and English ifs throughout these 40 days that Jesus suffered temptation in the wilderness. While we only get to see an example of three temptations, at the end of this Gospel lesson Luke records that “When the devil had ended *every* temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.” Which means that these few instances weren’t the only time Jesus had to suffer through the statement of “ei uious ei tou theou”. That no doubt he heard a few thousand eis before the end of his temptation, and a few million by the time he finally laid his life down on the cross for you and me.

The “ifs” of our Gospel lesson are nothing new and are still very much used today. Ifs always come up in our lives when we think about our relationships with our family, our friends, our spouse, and many others. Think about the marketing of different products and you’ll find “Ifs” everywhere. “If you really care you’ll do these things” Which is really saying “If you don’t do these things you don’t care”. It’s nothing new. It works in all sorts of advertising. “If you really are a basketball player you have to have these pairs of shoes.” Or “If you really are a serious fisherman you need these poles, or hooks, or bait” and the list goes on and on. It’s manipulation 101. But this is a more serious battle of wills than getting someone to buy shoes or fishing gear. This is a battle between good and evil out in the wilderness. A time when instead of seeing Jesus shining in the blinding white of His divinity like in the Transfiguration last week, we see him tired, hungry, and beaten down. Assaulted by a barrage of temptations by Satan himself.

Satan’s tempting style is reminiscent of a pitcher whose pitches are all good, but at the end of the day he sticks with his bread and butter. Doubt. It’s the oldest trick in the book. What was the first “pitch” so to speak that Satan threw in the Garden of Eden to Adam and Eve? He planted the seed of doubt. “Did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?” And over time the defenses of Eve fell and she gave in to the temptation. Here we see almost a return to the Garden of Eden. The Son of Man faced with the slanderer, enemy, and prince of lies in the wilderness. 40 days he plants the seeds of doubt, he asks for evidence of proof, he works on Jesus at his weakest point. And the most astounding part of this is that Jesus never falters, gives in, or even speaks from anything but the powerful Word of God.

It’s the resounding answer to Satan’s simple question. Satan says that If Jesus is the Son of God than he should show him by miraculous acts of changing stones into bread and putting himself in danger so the angels will take care of him. And while Jesus very easily can accomplish these things with His almighty power, Jesus gives the answer to why He is the Son of God by his response. Instead of buying into the lie that the only way to show Satan he was the Son of God was to do what Satan wanted him to do; The proof to his divinity comes from the fact that He is constantly pointing back to something that is Holy, divine, and inspired. The Word of God. The proof isn’t found in stones becoming bread. The proof is found in His knowledge of the Scriptures. The proof isn’t found in throwing himself off of the pinnacle of the temple. The proof is found in the truth of God’s Word, in the fact that He is hungry in the first place. His humanity was proof. His thirst and weakness was proof. The fact that he even went out to the wilderness to be tempted was proof that He was the Son of God. These were the answers to the eis and the “ifs”.

We too are faced with the “eis” in our own lives. Satan still throws the same pitches to tempt us and lead us away from God’s protection and care. And he tempts us just like he does with Christ in the wilderness. Satan has always been described as a tactician, a strategist, someone who doesn’t attack at the post powerful point or when you are at full strength. He comes to Christ after he’s already hungry in the wilderness and tempts him with food. He leaves and goes off to come back to tempt Christ again at an opportune time. He is a prowling lion who stalks and sneaks up on his prey seeking not just to injure, but to devour. And so he comes to us at our weakest moments. At our weakest spots. Targeting us when our faith has grown weak and when we are in compromising situations. And he comes with the same ifs, and the same lies.

“If God really cared about you he would be doing this or he wouldn’t allow that to happen.” “If you really are an independent person with free will than God won’t care if you do those things he told you not to do.” “If you really want to do that, you should, no one is allowed to judge anything you do anyway.” The list of “ifs” goes on and on and the temptations continue all throughout our lives. Christ battled with Satan in the wilderness and in the same way our lives are battles as part of the Church militant. And while our Spirit remains strong in the face of temptation, and our faith remains in the midst of a constant attack by Satan and his demons, our flesh is weak. The battle becomes too long and too tiresome. We give in to our desires. We betray the very Son of God who stood strong against temptation in the wilderness. We fall into the trap, we take the bait, we believe the lies. We sin. We actively choose to sin, we omit doing the good we know we should do. We feel the weight of that sin, and again Satan returns with the ifs to lead us farther down into despair and sadness, even when God has assured us we are forgiven. “If you really were a Christian, you would never do such terrible things.” “If you really loved God you wouldn’t neglect all of those people who need help.” The slanderer loves nothing more than tempting us to sin, and then berating us for sinning. He wants us to give in to the despair of being separated from God, so that we remain that way for all eternity, suffering in hell with him.

Which is why this Gospel lesson isn’t about our victory over Satan in the wilderness. It’s not a book on “How to destroy Satan for dummies”. It’s really not focused on us at all, but instead it points again to all that Christ did for us in our place. Similar to the Baptism of Jesus Christ, Jesus didn’t need to be baptized, but He was baptized for us, to give us His perfection, and take upon himself our sin. It’s just as it was in the days of creation. The almighty God didn’t need to rest, but he set aside a day of rest for our benefit so that we can receive the gifts He gives us on His Sabbath day in His Divine Service. Jesus’ suffering wasn’t on account of his sin, not here in the wilderness and not later as he’s beaten, mocked, and flogged. But he suffers the pain of hunger, the battle with Satan, the mockery and pain of the Roman soldiers, all for us. To save us. To turn the “ifs” back on themselves to ask another simple question. “If Jesus didn’t love you, would he really have come to this Earth as a man?” “If Jesus didn’t love you, would he have suffered temptation in the wilderness?” “If Jesus didn’t love you, would he have willingly gave up his life on the cross for your sin?” In his suffering we see his love. In his death he earns for us eternal life by paying the price of our sin.

And through his death the accusations of Satan are put to rest. While Satan stands before us and says “If they have sinned than they deserve to die!” Christ clothes us in His perfection and says “They are mine, and since I am perfect, they are perfect.” The ifs are all turned around. The truth stares Satan and his demons in the face. The truth sets us free to live lives of thanksgiving to God, and even to rejoice in the moments of suffering that we face in our lives. To go out into the wilderness of this world and take the Word of God with us to refute the lies of Satan. But ultimately to rejoice in the victory that Christ won on our behalf.

ei uious ei tou theou. “If you are the Son of God”. The proof is right before us. Last week we received proof by seeing his divinity, this week we see proof in his humanity. So now throughout these 40 days, let there be no doubt in our minds that He was indeed the very Son of God. Who took upon himself your sin and died to save you. Who declared you righteous, innocent, and perfect through his righteousness, innocence and perfection. Who, as we will talk about on Wednesday nights, was wounded for you. Who died to save you. Who now lives and will take you to be with him soon. May God bless all of us in our daily battles with temptation and sin, to see the truth in the midst of doubt, and to answer the eis and ifs with the sure confidence of the Gospel, that we are baptized and saved children of God.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.