

3-9-2025

Unrevealed Until Its Season week1:

“Trusting in God’s Strength”
(A Mighty Fortress is Our God #110)

1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness,

2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.

3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

4 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.

6 And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please.

7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

8 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,

10 for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,'

11 and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

12 Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.
(Luk 4:1-13 NRS)

During our Lenten journey this year, we begin our sermon series, **"Unrevealed Until Its Season."** This series is inspired by James C. Howell's book and the hymn *"Hymn of Promise,"* reflecting on how God's grace and transformation often remain unseen until the right time. Each Sunday, we will focus on a hymn from the United Methodist Hymnal, connecting it with the lectionary scriptures and themes of Lent.

Today, we will focus on "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" written by Martin Luther, the greater Reformation leader, through the lens of Luke 4:1-13 which is known as Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

On the first Sunday in Lent, we reflect on **the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness.** He didn't begin his ministry by spending three to four years in a theological seminary. He begins his ministry by being tempted by Satan. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. That alone is a striking statement. Immediately after his baptism, immediately after the voice from heaven declared, **"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased," (Luke 3:22)** Jesus does not go to a place of comfort or celebration. He does not begin his public ministry surrounded by followers eager to hear his teaching. Instead, he is led into the wilderness, a place of solitude, hunger, and testing.

For forty days, Jesus fasts. He is physically weak, yet spiritually prepared. And it is in this vulnerable state that Satan comes, whispering temptations. The important thing to remember when interpreting this story is that it's not about 'temptation' in the way we commonly use the word. It's not about sexual temptation or the temptation to have another piece of chocolate cake.

But today's story deals with temptations that strike at the core of Jesus' identity and calling. The Satan said to him, **"If you are the Son of God, command this stone**

to become a loaf of bread."(v.3) "If you are God's Son..." Devil questions about Jesus's identity as God's Son. We remember what happened at the time of Jesus' baptism. Now Satan says, "If you are God's Son, let's see you act like it! Give us some solid evidence that you are who the heavenly voice said you are. We need facts. We need proof. Turn these stones into bread. It's a subtle but powerful challenge. Prove yourself. You are hungry. You have power. Why not use your power to satisfy your needs? But Jesus responds with the words of Scripture: **"It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"** **(v.4) (Deuteronomy 8:3).** His identity is not rooted in what he can do for himself but in the will of God.

Satan tries again. He takes Jesus up to a high place, shows him all the kingdoms of the world, and makes an enticing offer: **"To you I will give their glory and all this authority...if you worship me."** It is a shortcut to power, a way to accomplish his mission without suffering, without the cross. But Jesus stands firm: **"It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"** **(v.8)** (Deuteronomy 6:13).

One last attempt. Satan brings Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and challenges him: **"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here."** He even quotes Scripture, twisting God's Word to fit his scheme. "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you." But Jesus refuses: **"It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"****(v.12)** (Deuteronomy 6:16).

With that, Satan left Jesus. The Gospel of Luke makes it clear that Jesus' temptation did not end in the wilderness. Throughout his ministry, the same challenges arose again and again. These were not just Jesus' temptations. They were Israel's temptations in the wilderness. They were the church's temptations in the time of the

Reformation. And they are our temptations today.

During the Reformation, the church was crumbling under a crisis of identity and calling. The central message of the gospel—that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone—had been distorted. The church taught that grace was not enough, that something more was required: **indulgences** (Indulgences were marketed as a way to "buy" God's grace and forgiveness.), abuse of the power from Pope, clergy Exploitation of the People financial offerings and many more. Instead of trusting in God's love freely given, people were burdened with the fear that they had to earn their salvation. **Luther's 95 Theses, nailed to the church door in Wittenberg (1517)**, was a direct attack on indulgences and the idea that the Pope had authority over salvation.

This was nothing less than a temptation—one that challenged the very identity of a Christian. These temptations did not end with Luther in the Reformation. They are alive in our world today. We live in a culture that constantly tells us: **You are not enough as you are. You must achieve more, prove yourself, seek validation. You must seek power and recognition. Influence is what makes you valuable. You must demand proof of God's love.** If God really loves you, where is the evidence? Satan's whispers have not changed: *"Turn these stones into bread—prove your worth." "Bow before me—compromise, and I will give you success." "Throw yourself down—test God to do something great for you if God really loves you."*

Pastors are not immune to these temptations. In ministry, the temptation is to try to meet every need, solve every problem, make everyone happy—to measure success not by faithfulness but by approval. The temptation is to believe that we must accomplish something great to be valuable, rather than trusting that faithfulness itself is the calling.

But Jesus shows us another way.

Martin Luther saw this theological fraud and knew that the only weapon against such deception was God's Word. Just as Jesus stood on the truth of God's Word in the wilderness, Luther stood on the truth of God's Word in the face of a corrupt church. And it was this conviction that gave rise to the great hymn: **"A Mighty Fortress is Our God"** (Luther wrote the words and composed the hymn tune between 1527 and 1529.)

This is where the words of Luther's hymn give us strength. This hymn does not deny the reality of evil. In fact, it vividly describes how Satan and his forces surround us, seeking to bring destruction. He writes:

"For still our ancient foe/ Doth seek to work us woe; / His craft and power are great/ And, armed with cruel hate, / On earth is not his equal."

Luther recognized that evil is real, powerful, and relentless. The devil is not simply a symbolic force; it is an enemy who uses lies, fear, and temptation to pull us away from our identity in God. The hymn reminds us that Satan's deception is clever, its power is strong, and it is filled with hate against God's people. But Luther does not leave us in despair. Despite the magnitude of evil, despite the constant temptation to doubt, compromise, or fear, despite the reality that we on our own are no match for Satan, Luther proclaims a greater truth:

The Prince of Darkness grim / We tremble not for him / His rage we can endure / For lo, his doom is sure / One little word shall fell him.

"One little word shall fell him." What is this "one little word"? It is the Word of God—the same truth of Scripture that Jesus used to defeat Satan in the wilderness. It is the gospel, the declaration that Christ has already won the victory. Jesus did not need to

prove himself to Satan because he already knew who he was. Luther did not need to compromise because he already knew the truth of Scripture. And we do not need to exhaust ourselves trying to earn love, because we are already loved by God. God's love and grace is not something to be won. It is not something we must chase. It is freely given.

Scripture tells us: **"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." (Ephesians 2:8)** – We cannot earn what God freely gives. **"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1)** – We are already God's beloved!

Dear sisters and brother! Nothing can make God love us more or less. The power of evil is real. The weight of temptation is real. The enemy continues to whisper the same lies: "You are not enough." "You need to prove yourself worthy." "You need power and success to matter." "God's love is not enough—seek approval elsewhere."

But we do not need to listen. We do not need to test God. We do not need to chase power. We do not need to prove our worth. We can simply stand—stand on the truth of God's love, stand on the power of God's Word, stand in the confidence that we belong to God. God's Word is unshakable. God's love is unwavering. God's truth is enough. A mighty fortress is our God. A bulwark never failing. One little word shall fell evil power. That word is God's Word. That word is truth. That word is enough. Amen.