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The Devil Made Me Do It-Luke 4:1-11

Let us pray: Today, we begin to journey with Jesus through the season of Lent, which brings us to face some of our own weaknesses and temptations. Let us worship God and walk the journey together, Amen.

In the 1970s comedian Flip Wilson made "The Devil made me do it" a national catchphrase. As host of his own TV variety show, Flip Wilson created a recurring character named Geraldine.

And every time Geraldine's husband accused her of doing something wrong, whether it was buying a dress that was too expensive or crashing the car into the side of the church, her excuse was always the same: "It wasn't me. The Devil made me do it."

Many of us grew up hearing that catchphrase, and it has affected the way we see the devil. We believe he has the power to "make" us do things. Or we imagine him as a little guy wearing a red suit, with a pitchfork, sitting on our left shoulder, whispering in our ear.

And meanwhile, there's a little angel perched on our right shoulder, trying to counteract whatever temptation the devil is whispering to us. And in the cartoons, the devil usually won. Is that how temptation works? Is the devil equally as powerful as God?

Can he "make" us do anything we don't want to do? The short answer is no. Jesus made it clear that the One who is in us is greater than the one that is in the world (1 John 4:4). The truth is, the devil doesn't have any power over us that we don't let him have.

But he can be persuasive. And the closer we are walking with God, the harder he will work to get us off track. Just look at Jesus. In Luke 4, we read that Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

Notice that, first of all, that the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness, precisely in order to be tempted by the devil! What's up with that? You see, God is going to have a faithful and obedient son who does overcome the devil's temptations.

Adam failed the test. Israel failed the test. But Jesus will pass, with flying colors. So, the Spirit leads Jesus out into the wilderness for that purpose. "Into the wilderness." Adam and Eve were in the Garden when the devil tempted them, and they yielded to his temptations.

The nation of Israel, after they came out of Egypt, were coming through the wilderness when they failed their test. And as a result, they wandered for forty years there, in the wilderness.

So now Jesus is going to “re-do” that experience and get it right. Forty days will do the job. “And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.”

Adam and Eve were tempted through food, weren’t they? They were tempted to eat of the fruit of that one tree from which the Lord had told them not to eat. Even though God had given them all the other trees from which to eat, the devil tempted them to eat from that one. And it looked so good for food.

The nation of Israel was tempted through food, weren’t they? They kept grumbling about not having the types of food they had back in Egypt, and then they grumbled about the food that the Lord was supplying them there in the wilderness.

And so now the devil is going to try to tempt Jesus through the avenue of his hungry belly. “If you are the Son of God,” he says, “command these stones to become loaves of bread.” Now, as the Son of God, could Jesus have been able to turn stones into bread?

Yes. No problem. It was easily within his power to do so. Indeed, later in the gospel, Jesus has no problem turning a few loaves of bread into enough to feed thousands of people. In that situation, there would be nothing wrong in Jesus’ doing so.

But here, in the temptation in the wilderness, it’s a different case. This is where the question of Jesus’ identity as the Son of God comes into play. Notice that the devil says, “If you are the Son of God.”

Now, the devil is not denying the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. No, he concedes that Jesus is the Son of God, which Jesus had just heard being affirmed by the Father at his baptism.

But the devil’s approach is more subtle, and goes something like this: “OK, Jesus, you just heard the Father call you his beloved Son. But if you’re so ‘beloved,’ then why is he letting you starve out here in the wilderness? You deserve better than that.

Look, you are the Son of God! Use that! You know you can change these stones into bread. What would be so wrong with that? Food is a good thing. And you need it, don’t you? So, go ahead, turn those stones into bread. You’re God’s Son, after all.”

You see, the devil is pretty crafty and cunning in his temptations. He doesn't usually take a head-on approach. More often, he comes at things from the side, knocking down our barriers little by little. It's a more subtle approach that the devil prefers.

So here the temptation for Jesus is to use his status as God's Son for his own benefit, to satisfy his own desires, rather than to do the will of the Father who sent him. "If you are the Son of God," the devil says.

In other words, You're the Son of God, but what kind of a Son are you going to be? How are you going to use that status? That was the nature of the temptation.

How does the devil work on you? What does he whisper in your ear? I'm guessing he doesn't usually come right out and say, "Listen, Christian, renounce your faith, curse God, and come join me in hell for eternity." No, that would be a little too obvious, wouldn't it?

Rather, the devil comes at us with soft and smooth and convincing tones: "Listen, Christian, you're God's child, aren't you? And God should want the best for his children, shouldn't he? So, if there's something you want, something you want to do, you should be able to get it or do it.

Within reason, of course. No big sins. No, just to be able to satisfy your desires, that's all. And look, God is in the grace-and-forgiveness business, isn't he?

So just do what you want, don't listen to that other voice in your other ear—yeah, just go for it. And then you can repent later. God will forgive you. You're God's child, after all."

Do you see the nature of the devil's temptations? Subtle and crafty. No all-out frontal assaults. But more, from the side, incremental breaking-down of barriers. Friends, if you're like me, you can recognize how often we fall for the devil's subtle tricks and traps.

We're like our parents, Adam and Eve. We're like the children of Israel. Unfaithful sons and daughters. Being led down that road, we will wind up being driven out of the Garden, away from the tree of life, being left to die in the wilderness, never entering the Promised Land.

But thank God, Jesus came to rescue us from that death and that judgment. He came as our Champion, our divine Champion, taking on the devil in mortal combat. And Jesus prevailed. To the devil's very real temptation of turning the stones into bread, Jesus replies, quoting Scripture:

"Man, shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." And so on down the line, through all the temptations. Jesus will be the one faithful Son who gets it right.

You see, the devil is trying to divert and distract Jesus from carrying out the mission on which he was sent, which is to go to the cross for our salvation.

If the devil can divert Jesus right at the outset of his ministry, so much the better. That's what this is about: to see what kind of a Son Jesus will be. The faithful and obedient one? Or a Son who will use his power for his own benefit, instead of doing the will of his Father?

Thank God, Jesus passed the test. And he would continue that faithful course, all the way to the cross. Perhaps that is the reason we start every Lent with the story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness; we must answer again and again, who is in charge. Jesus answered it again in the garden just before his arrest when he said to God not my will but yours will be done, and he answered it on the cross.

Victory begins and ends in the heart when we let God be in charge and we stay in our place. And even when Jesus was hanging on the cross, and people were taunting him with words just like the devil's here- "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!"

No, Jesus would not succumb to that temptation, either. The cross was what Jesus was sent to do, and he would not be diverted. Instead, he was determined. Jesus is the faithful Son of God, who does his Father's will. Jesus indeed is the very Son of God, by whose blood was shed for our sins and now we are forgiven, and now you will not die forever, but rather you will live.

Satan, you were very crafty with your "If you are the Son of God" approach. Yes, Satan, Jesus is the Son of God. But he will not use his status as Son in a way that will take him away from his mission. He's got a job to do. Which is to be the Savior of all the people here in this room.

And of all the people in this world. Jesus knows his identity. He is secure in it, and you, Satan, you will not be able to shake him from it. And now you, dear child of God-you, dear Christian here today:

Rejoice that you have such a Savior. Take refuge in him. Realize who you are in Christ. Your identity is wrapped up in him. You are forgiven, for Christ's sake.

You have life in his name. And you will also find strength to resist the devil, when he comes whispering in your ear. Remember who you are, and whose you are.

Martin Luther famously said: "Almost every night when I wake up the devil is there and wants to dispute with me. I have come to this conclusion: When the argument that the Christian is without the law and living above the law doesn't help, I instantly chase him away with a poop."

You are a child of God, called to use your status for God's purposes. You are a child of God—because Jesus, the Son of God, used his sonship for your salvation.

Remember the Holy Spirit? He never left Jesus. He kept guiding Jesus. Angels came and served Jesus. Jesus spent time in prayers of comfort. The presence of God never left Him. The presence of God will never leave you.

Holy friends, as we walk these great forty days from temptation to crucifixion, I bid you to walk gently and with your heart wide open. Listen for Jesus. Jesus will call out to you as he makes his way from temptation to crucifixion.

Jesus will call out to you from the cross. And in the midst of death, domination, and violence, you will hear his voice: "He who is in me is indeed greater than he who is in the world." The Spirit of the Lord is in me and in you. Take heart in that." Every temptation is a test of your love for God. Overcoming temptation is proof of your love for Him.

Looking to Jesus' example, where are we called to resist temptation? If we look to what God desires for us over our own desires, can we lead a life pleasing to God?

As we enter Lent, we repent—we turn back to God. We acknowledge our sins—our shortcomings, our faults—and our temptations. We look to Jesus, who has come to free us from our worldly ways that lead us to death, and instead, leads us to forgiveness and eternal life with God.

How can you turn back to God this Lent? You can leave the ways of this world and instead, remember to look to what God desires for you. How can this time of Lent be a period of renewal in your relationship with God? By resisting temptation. Don't let the devil make you do it. Amen.

Let us pray: Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan. Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations. And as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save. Through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.