

Today we hear how Jesus *Himself*
Was tempted by the devil.
It's *interesting* how *slick* the devil can be –
He does *not* usually come *at* us wearing *horns* and wielding a *pitchfork!*
He's far more *subtle* –
Using even *good* things to lure us away from the joy of belonging to *God*.
And so, the devil as *tempter* –
Tries to *lure* us away from our true *life* –
Telling us we're *better off apart* from God –
But *apart* from God,
There *is* no life.
The tempter will *lie & cheat* his way into *stripping* us of our *inheritance* –
Our true *identity* – as God's *beloved* children.

It was no *accident* that *right* after Jesus was *baptized* –
After the Heavenly Father proclaimed:
This is my beloved *Son* – with whom I am well *pleased*.
That the *spirit* of love *drove* Jesus into the *desert* – to be *tempted* – *tested* –
And that love was only *strengthened* from the fires of those temptations.

Baptized into the life of Jesus,

We *too* can be tempted –

But we too can be made *stronger* by the forging fire of God's *love*.

Here's a line you'll never see in a *Hallmark* on *Valentine's Day*:

Anyone who loves –

Suffers.

True love means *dying* to our own *selfishness*.

It means we love even when those we love seem to *reject* it.

Temptations can help us to *really* know what we're *made of* –

Or *more* importantly – *Who* we were made *from* –

And *Who* we were made *for*.

And the *answer* is one-and-the-same:

God –

Who *is* love and Who is *mercy* when we *fail* to love Him back.

As the *creation* story tells us –

We were made from the very *breath* of God.

And we were in *perfect* harmony with His *heart*.

And *then* –

The *tempter* came in.

And he takes just a *grain* of truth – and *spins* it into a *lie*.

He lies when he suggests to Eve,

That God doesn't want her to eat of *any* of the trees of the garden.

And he'll lie to *us* –

Planting the *poisoned* thinking that God doesn't want us to be *happy* –

That choosing *God* is *somehow* a real *downer* in life –

That we are *rivals* with *God* for the pleasures of the world.

That it's better to make a particular *pleasing thing* our god –

Or a loaf of *bread* from those *stones* in the desert –

Luring us from our *true* hunger – the hunger for *God* –

And every *Word* that come from His lips –

And getting us addicted to *other* hungers –

For food that *perishes* –

For money that will *never* be enough –

For *using* people in relationships only to feel even *more* empty and *alone* –

For a sense of *power* or *control* – the weight of which only *crushes* us.

The devil lied *again* –

Implying God *keeps* good things *from* us because he doesn't *want* us to become *like* Him.

To *become* god – and knock him *down* in some cosmic game of *King of the mountain*.

And the devil lies a *third* time:

Saying there's no such *thing* as evil –

Or *sin* –

Or the *consequences* of sin: *death* – in being *cut off* from God who is the *root* of our life.

So Eve, and then *Adam too* –

Have taken their *eye* off God –

And off *themselves* as beloved *children* of God –

And they take *pleasure* in the forbidden fruit of *pride* and *lust* and *envy*.

But God sends us His *Son* –

To breathe life into us once *again*!

He shows us the way of *humility* –

And a heart that will *not* forsake His *inheritance* as God's *beloved*.

The tempter goes after *Jesus* too –

Luring Him in His *hunger* –

But Jesus *remembers* that His *true* hunger is for the *Father*.

The tempter lures Jesus by trying to give him a sense of *entitlement* –

If you are the Son of God, live as recklessly as you want –

And God will pamper you.

And Jesus is finally tempted by power *itself* –

But HE remembers that *true* power comes *not* in subjugating the world to Himself –

But by *trusting* in the power of *love* –

Giving Himself as the *bridge*

That *overcomes* the *wedge evil* has driven between God and humanity.

When we feel like we're *alone* –

Struggling in the *deserts* of life –

May we *look* to Jesus –

With us in our hunger –

And know that only *He* can give us true and lasting *nourishment*.

Invoke the name of Jesus whose heart is *always* true to God's *word* –

And the power of the devil will *fizzle*.

And as *often* as we give *in* to temptation,

Never *tire* from humbly *turning back* to God,

Who *never* tires of *forgiving* us and *filling* us with the power of His love –

Which endures all assaults.