

**Sermon Notes – March 9, 2025**  
**The Holy Gospel of St. Luke 4: 1-14**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**“Returning To God”**

The Lent 1 gospel reading is a story of the temptation of Jesus from the lectionary year's primary gospel. The New Testament's book of Mark is much shorter, of course. There are a few differences between Matthew's and Luke's telling of this story, most obviously in the order of the temptations of Jesus. More subtle is the centrality of the Spirit in Luke; within that reading, Jesus enters the wilderness “full of the Holy Spirit” (4: 1) after his baptism. But also immediately after this reading, His preaching text in Nazareth begins as, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (4: 18).

The temptations themselves have considerable later resonance. Jesus refuses to miraculously provide bread for Himself but later does so for the crowd. He refuses the lure of imperial power, greater than that of kingdoms, but at His trial and crucifixion He claims (and redefines) kingship and sends His apostles to preach globally. He refuses to jump off the temple to prove that God will rescue Him, but later courts arrest and execution, not to avoid the ultimate sacrifice, but rather to be fully obedient to His Father's will at the cost of His own life.

One theme running through the temptation story is Jesus' refusal to substitute His own desire for that which is the will of God. This is also a theme in the first reading from Deuteronomy, where the temptation is not hunger, but prosperity. When things go well and the harvest is plentiful, the Israelites are tempted to think they are a self-made people and that their prosperity is due to their wisdom, hard work, and virtue. The ritual of first fruits provides a reminder that thanksgiving to God always has priority over self-congratulation. The Israelites were not descendants of aristocrats but of nomads and slaves. Their sufficiency was founded on God's rescue, which means that they still have much in common with the widows, orphans, and sojourners in the land.

In the temptation narrative of the New Testament reading, both the tempter and Jesus quote from the Word, but only Jesus quotes the Word of God, while the tempter spins scripture for evil purposes. (In reading and interpreting the temptation, we need to keep in mind that the tempter is “the

father of lies" [John 8: 44]. We should also guard against believing that the tempter's bribes are real.)

In reading Romans, we see Paul eager to bridge any perceived gap between Jewish and Gentile Christians by affirming that both groups need, depend on, and are assured of the love of God. This is the Word of God in Jesus Christ, available to every person. We will be tried and tempted, and may even be misled (unlike Jesus, our will is not perfectly in tune with God's), but the message of Lent is that God is dependably faithful to the baptismal promises. And finally, and by the way, verses 9 and 10 call on Hebrew parallelism; confessing and believing are the same; the lordship of Jesus and His resurrection are facets of the same reality, as are justification and salvation. These are not steps but a single reality.