**Spiritual Warfare**

Based on [Matthew 4:1-11](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt4.1-11)

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First Sunday in Lent: Invocabit

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Today’s text is about spiritual warfare and the victory we have in Jesus Christ who fights for us, and who emboldens us to struggle against the flesh.

There are some people today who say they are spiritual but not religious. This doesn’t answer whether their spirituality is Holy. The devil is a spirit, demons are spirits…spirituality is just as susceptible to error as religion. The spirit of antichrist is in the world now. It is simply reckless to converse casually with a different spirit…that is, any person animated by something other than a clear confession of Christ. Bad company ruins good morals. The devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. He is not looking to break down your door and charge in, he’s patient like dripping water, only looking for a beginning, a foothold, and disguised as an angel of light. Resist him, firm in your faith.

Falling away doesn’t happen overnight. People begin to fall away from the true faith little by little--first by not going to church, then by not reading their bible, then by not praying. In the end they lock Jesus up in a corner closet of their mind saving him for special occasions, thinking its okay “I still believe him in my heart?” Then he takes his spirit away from them—which they deserve—and they lose faith and don’t look back.

Friends in Christ, this isn’t just a simple accident--it is orchestrated by the prince of demons, a campaign carried out patiently for as long as it takes. That is the path from religion to so-called “spirituality”. The right Spirit nurtured and expressed in true religion. And any purely “spiritual” conversion so hamstrings religious expression until finally—for all practical purposes--the disciples’ call to resist evil, hate sin, and to put no trust in worldly wealth or friendships is forgotten; and *church*, *discipleship* and *Jesus Christ* are replaced by *the world*, it’s *friendship*, and *the spirit of antichrist*. This doesn’t happen by a single decision, as you would be tempted to believe by Billy Graham on one hand, or Dr. Faustus on the other. It’s not instantaneous, it happens through gradual spiritual erosion, a series of bad choices that take hold in the long term, and effected by those powers at work to hinder the coming of God’s kingdom in the world, and in your life. Remember,

**12**For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

The First Sunday in Lent begins with a gospel reading that tunes us right in to this spiritual warfare. Your enemy is not your incorrigible spouse, your impossible family, your cruel boss or coworkers. Your enemy is the devil and his angels. He usually disguises himself in people you meet, stirring the pot where he may to cause division, strife, malice, envy, and so on. He usually hides himself in people, even as Jesus said to Peter, “Get behind me Satan. Even as in the beginning he hid himself for Eve in the form a serpent.

When the devil comes to tempt Jesus, he doesn’t hide in any such creature. He comes as himself. Jesus knows what is in the hearts of men, he is not deceived by appearances, or flattered by sensations. The devil doesn’t waste time hiding his true self from God’s only Son. He knows this sale is not going to be gotten by bells and whistles, vain flattery or gullibility. Satan knows Jesus is the Son of God, knows he has come to wage war on behalf of the human race, and simple tricks aren’t going to work.

Jesus’ baptism was his commissioning. The Holy Spirit descended upon him, then sent him into the wilderness. This was Satan’s opportunity to redirect the mission, to try to divert him from the cross of suffering to the throne of glory. The devil has three temptations, but they are all of one kind. Satan tempts Jesus to abuse his authority. He tempts Jesus to use his power, status, and right as the Son of God, to begin his mission in majesty, rather than in ministry.

Jesus had been fasting a long time and was hungry. Satan doesn’t tempt Jesus to eat, as would be easy enough had Satan come and presented him with some bread. The point isn’t trying to get Jesus to eat, or even sin generally. And it doesn’t look like this was about getting Jesus to break his fast. This was “after forty days and forty nights”, so after the period of fasting. But Jesus was certainly hungry, and Satan wants Jesus to abuse his authority, to commit a sin unique to his status. He is the Son of God, all things were made through Him and without him was not anything made that was made. God sent him to save others, not himself. His calling was to take on the role of mankind and take the form of a servant. Yes he does signs and wonders out of compassion and to further the proclamation of the Gospel, but he did not come to serve himself.

As volunteer clergy, I have a card that lets me park freely in the hospital when I do visits. What if I used that card for personal visits? That would be an abuse. Maybe a small thing, but an abuse. I was not given free parking to help myself, only to help others. What if a police officer flashed his lights, sped and passed cars in the oncoming lane in order to be first in line for a black Friday sale. What if a politician used his office and political sway to help a corporation avoid conviction of a crime?

God’s law is written on our hearts and we know it is wrong to abuse your authority. Jesus could have abused his authority by turning stones into bread, and sated his hunger in a way not available to you and me. But he was sent to be tempted in every way as we are, and we are not able to turn stones to bread when we are starving, neither could he, and neither would he.

The second and third temptations are of the same kind. They are (except for the third, interestingly enough) prefaced with “If you are the son of God…”. This is not to try to get Jesus to doubt his identity, but to tempt him to use any means at his disposal to come in majesty, rather than ministry, and to assume the right hand of God without fulfilling his calling. Jesus was called to make himself nothing and die, and then he would raise from the dead, ascend to heaven, be seated at the right hand of God to rule all things.

The Holy Spirit sent Jesus to battle with the unholy spirit. And Jesus won the battle, not by a show of strength, but a show of faithfulness. He stuck to his Father’s plan, fulfilled His word despite very reasonable arguments by Satan to end the suffering now and assume the throne. Why wait? Surely God wouldn’t want you to suffer. Why wait for God to bless your marriage…just end the suffering. Why wait for God to take your life…just end the suffering. Why give birth to a baby you can’t provide for or love…just end the suffering. All of these conclusions hide a very important premise. We can’t trust God to watch over us and bless us in his own time and according to his own purposes. He must want us to do evil to accomplish good. He must want us to sin so that grace may abound. Jesus is the Son of God, why should he wait to rule the world. We are god’s children, why should we wait to rule the world? Because the meek shall not conquer the world, we shall inherit it, through no merit or worthiness or smart politicking of our own, but through the righteousness blood and merit of Jesus Christ.

There is a spiritual battle going on, the battle lines are drawn and Jesus, our commander has refused to make a deal with the devil, because the father had a better plan to reconcile all things through the blood of his cross. Don’t bargain with the enemy, he has nothing to offer. Christ has won the victory.