

Can I Entice You?

Congregation responds: ***Get behind me, Satan!***

First Congregational Church Branford

Luke 4:1-13 - Enticer stands to the side through this reading

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I like my garb - don't you?

I think we should begin - don't you?

Devil's food cake on cake platter. Two plates with forks. *Devil's food, of course. Is anyone on a diet, or diabetic? How 'bout a piece of cake? ... (Get behind me, Satan!)* hhh

Vodka, 2 glasses, pour: *anyone a recovering alcoholic? anyone need to numb what's going on in your life? How about a little drinky poo? (Get behind me, Satan!)* hhh

Penthouse Magazine (Fake): *Anyone lonely in their marriage? How bout a sneaky peek? (Get behind me, Satan!)* hhh

Mirror: *mirror, mirror on the wall, whose the fairest of them all? I have the very best plastic surgeons. You can be young and beautiful- - just give me your soul. (Get behind me, Satan!)* hhh

Cash register, money: *Don't Americans want to be rich? Maybe you're having a hard time making ends meet.... (Get behind me, Satan!)* hhh

You must be awfully proud of yourselves today; but, I'll be back - again, and again, and again. My table is long. (turn around - take off cape, turn inside out to now show cross and dove of peace, and drape over table)

Let us pray... Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

Poor Lucifer. As the story goes, he'd been God's *favorite* angel. He had the highest seat of heaven. He had about him *so* much light, so he was named Lucifer, which means *Morning Star*. But, Lucifer became so impressed with his own

beauty, intelligence, power, and position that he began to desire for himself the honor and glory that belonged to God alone. He began to think that he was like God, maybe bigger and better than God! I'm sure it pained God very much to cast Lucifer from heaven. That is how Lucifer came to fall from heaven. From *self-generated* pride. And, immediately began to seek revenge, to spread evil.

In the Gospel According to Luke, Jesus is baptized at 30 years old, and now full of the Holy Spirit is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Had God enticed Jesus enough to be who God needed him to be, or could Jesus be enticed to work for the other side? God needed to know *before* Jesus began his ministry!!!

Here's how I assume the temptation happened: the tempter knew better than to start when Jesus was fresh and *well-fed*. Oh, no, not on day one. He let Jesus stew first, watching from a distance as God's Beloved said his prayers. The first couple of weeks you can imagine that Jesus said them while he walked around. Then when his legs gave out from hunger, he probably said his prayers sitting down, and finally, near the end, he probably said them lying flat on the ground. **That** was when the devil knew it was time to start, when Jesus had run out of his own resources and might be open to accepting a little help. Satan knew exactly what would entice the son of God: food, absolute authority, and protection. What a win this would be if he could entice *Jesus* to use his power for evil!!!

To make matters worse, for forty days and forty nights there'd been no sign of God at all. The sky stayed shut, there were no doves, no voice from heaven speaking reassuring words.

I think I might as well acknowledge here that evil tries to entice us our whole life long - you know that - *looking for opportune times*. The 12-step programs use an adage called HALT - that you're most susceptible to temptation when you're hungry, angry, lonely, or tired - so, HALT! - before you do something you regret! The tempter knows we're also susceptible when a relationship of ours shatters, we lose our job, our health, or our home. The devil comes calling and entices, "*Hey, if you are a child of God, shouldn't things be going a little smoother for you? If you are really a Christian, I mean, shouldn't you be happier, healthier, richer, safer? ...* - I mean, honestly, sometimes it seems God's not there for you, right? Isn't that what non-believer always criticize?? Satan comes along and says, *I'll make everything better... in-exchange-for-your-soul*.

So, what did Jesus do to protect his soul? He armed himself with his favorite scriptures, and he confronted the devil, saying, *Get behind me, Satan*. Have you ever done that? I have! I've found it really, really helps! Here on this first Sunday of Lent, God asks us what he asked of his son, who will **you** give your allegiance to? Like Jesus, we, too can resist temptation through scripture, and confronting Satan head on.

Let's look at a few of our own temptations. Being tempted by a certain food may seem funny and insignificant, but if you've had food issues, you know what happens when you overeat - how you feel physically, and how it makes you feel bad about yourself. Satan loves that, my friends. Makes you think you can find solace in that devil's food cake, or in that bottle of vodka. His job is to do whatever he can to bring you down, to take your light. If you have a spiritual hole in your heart, there's not enough food in the world that can fill it. No amount of alcohol, drugs, violence, gambling, adultery, is going to satiate you - *no matter what Satan tells you. Yes, eat that, drink that, drug that, sex that!*

God is the only one who can fill us, who can heal us....

Let's say times are hard at work, and the bills are piling up at home. The stress of arguments over money have beaten you down. You may be tempted to do something illegal to pad your bank account. Or gambling tempts you. *Satan's arms are wrapped around casinos!* Absolutely! If you've been depressed, have drugs tempted you? Have you been tempted to nurse depression with alcohol, or compulsive shopping? If you're lonely in a marriage, have you ever been tempted to have an affair - in person, or online - with a stranger, a co-worker, or a friend.

Let me say this: If anyone is being tempted right now to go outside of their marriage or primary relationship, *please* don't do it. It can be a huge temptation when a marriage is faltering, or has grown stale, or the kids are driving you nuts - and you just want to have a little fun. But, Satan will bring you down - and destroy you, and your family. He'll see you as an easy mark, and it won't be long before he comes by with *another* temptation... And, you gotta know this, beloved, the truth always comes out. Say *Get behind me, Satan*, and go and be *honest* with your loved one about how you're feeling in the relationship. You can even be honest and say that Bill/Julie is tempting you right now - *hey, honey, something's not right with us. Can we get back on track?*

Of course, there are any number of temptations - temptations to lash out in anger, temptations to look back and focus on past failures (that's a big, sad one...), tempted to seek revenge or to want something bad to happen to someone. This is all just the devil's work. For you to spread evil. The devil is all about *anything* that will bring you down, *anything* that will cause you to doubt yourself, *anything* to bring you down.

Hey, when you feel good about yourself you go and spread light, right! When you feel bad about yourself you're at risk to make others feel bad about themselves, too.

I wonder what scriptures there are that you turn to. I like, from Philippians, *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me....* and 1 John, *He that is in me is greater than he who is in the world...* When temptation comes calling, we

can look that cake, drug, new handbag, that oh so very supportive man or woman, or the anger in you that's getting ready to blow up at someone, and say.... *Get behind me, Satan! You will not come in here and destroy me, my soul, my life, my family, my church, my relationship with God. For it is written, worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*

Know this, beloved - if you've given up something for Lent, if you're trying to let something, or some behavior, go... it will be brought before you continually to tempt you! Times I've given up something for Lent, that very day, or the next day it starts flaunting itself before me! You can decide *today*, this *first* Sunday of Lent, how you're going to handle it.

The encouraging news is that having had a wilderness story, Jesus was even more prepared to proclaim the good news. Jesus was able to *entice* believers, saying believe in the GOOD news.

Because God is the *Greater* Enticer! Amen? With God, we can *strive* to say no to anything that leads us away from our *best* life. May you stay on his Loving Paths, doing what makes *your soul feel good and free... free.* Amen.