joying. He was promising Jesus was he was enti-
tled to but at the cost of idolatry. He was promis-
joying Jesus what he was entitled to without the pain and
suffering required to be obedient to the Father.
This was a shortcut to what Jesus deserved, but the
shortcut involved idolatry.

Because this is the last of the temptations, Jesus
now responds authoritatively, commanding Satan to
leave. He again quotes Deuteronomy 6:13 and
the command that God’s people worship and serve
only the Lord their God. Again, Jesus succeeded
where Israel failed. Jesus would not exploit his
authority as the Son of God to meet his own per-
sonal needs at the cost of obedience to the Father’s
will, nor would he exploit that authority to put God
to the test, nor would he exploit that authority to
receive all of the world’s glory by means of idola-
try. In all things, Jesus would be obedient to the
will of the Father. That obedience would be tested
in subsequent years as Jesus made his way to the
cross, but his obedience to the Father was estab-
lished here as a fact. Jesus’ temptation concludes
with verse 11, which says, “Then the devil left
him, and behold, angels came and were ministering
to him.” While Jesus was led by the Spirit into
the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, God sus-
tained him and ministered to him afterward.

Other Readings
While the story of Jesus’ temptation deliberately
brings to mind the testing of God’s people in the
wilderness, it really points all the way back to
the beginning. In Genesis 2, we read about the crea-
tion of human beings from the dust of the ground
(v 7). We read about the tree of life and the tree of
the knowledge of good and evil. Verses 1-4 say,
“1Have mercy on me, O God, according to your
steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy
blet out my transgressions. 2Wash me thoroughly
from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!
3For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever
before me. 4Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight, so that you
may be justified in your words and blameless in
your judgment.” Jesus, by his perfect obedience to
the Father, was perfectly righteous. Because of
our sin, we were rightly the objects of God’s
wrath (Ephesians 2:3). But in his mercy, God al-
lowed Jesus to endure the wrath we deserved by
his crucifixion and death. By putting our trust in
Jesus, God gives to us Jesus’ perfect righteous-
ness. 2Corinthians 5:21 says, “God made him who
had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we
might become the righteousness of God.” And so
in Christ, God shows us mercy, blots out our
transgressions, washes and cleanses us.

Conclusions
One, as we prepare ourselves to celebrate the cru-
cifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, it’s im-
portant for us to keep in mind that it’s the obedi-
ence of Jesus even unto death that is the source of
our salvation. In other words, you and I are not
saved because of our obedience, because our obe-
dience is imperfect at best. Even if God saved us
of all of our past sins but then demanded perfect
obedience from us, we wouldn’t make it more
than a day or so. In every moment of every day,
our salvation hinges on Jesus’ perfect obedience
to the Father’s will. He is the source of our salva-
tion and therefore the rightful object of our wor-
ship.

Two, while our salvation depends on Jesus perfect
obedience to the Father, Jesus invites us to take up
our crosses and follow him. Jesus reminds us that
a servant is no greater than his master (John
15:20). While Jesus’ obedience makes our salva-
tion possible, he was not obedient so that we
wouldn’t have to be. In fact, he invites us to walk
out his obedience to the Father like he did. In
verse 16:24, Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone
would come after me, let him deny himself and
take up his cross and follow me.” Like Jesus, we
will be tempted and tried. Like Jesus, we will
have the opportunity to take shortcuts that give us
what we’ve been promised without obedience to the
Father, but Jesus invites us to walk the path of
obedience with the help of the Holy Spirit, who
empowers our obedience.

Three, our response to God’s love and mercy and
the resulting gift of salvation through Jesus should
be one of gratitude. Our preparation for Easter
then, should both be solemn, as we think about
the depth of God’s love for us, and joyful as we think
about the depth of God’s love for us. We should
be overwhelmed with gratitude as we realize how
small we are and yet the height of God’s love for
us. When we look at the heavens, the work of
God’s hands, the moon and the stars, which he set
in place, we might ask ourselves what man is that
God is at all mindful of us, the sons of men that he
should in the least about us. Yet he made us a lit-
tle lower than the heavenly beings and crowned us
with glory and honor (Psalm 8), and in his love,
redeemed our lives from the pit through the sacri-
fice of Jesus for our sins.
This morning we’re going to begin our Easter series by looking at Matthew 4:1-11, which records Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness. Over the next few weeks we want to encourage you to read the daily readings with us as we prepare ourselves for Easter. You can pick up a printed copy of the readings at the welcome center, or view or download a digital copy of our website at wcag.org/easter. Each Sunday we will focus on the Gospel reading and tie in the other readings as appropriate. With that, let’s look at the temptation of Jesus.

Introduction (vv 1-2)

Jesus got his start with two pivotal events, his baptism, recorded in Matthew 3:13-17, and his temptation, recorded immediately after in Matthew 4:1-11. And while the two events are distinct, they are intimately connected to one another. Matthew provides a short introduction to the temptation of Jesus in verses 1-2, which say, “1Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.”

If we’re paying attention, the first verse is a bit shocking, while the second verse seems obvious to the point of being extraneous. Why is the first verse shocking? In the previous chapter, we read that when Jesus came up out of the water from being baptized “the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him (Matthew 3:16).” Not only so, but a voice came from heaven saying, “This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well-pleased (Matthew 3:17).” Never had God so clearly endorsed a candidate as he did Jesus, and yet it was the very same Holy Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness so that he could be tempted by the devil, no less.

Now, while it may seem shocking in the beginning, it’s not really that surprising when you remember that it was God who led the Israelites into the wilderness for forty years, “to humble [them] and to test [them] in order to know what was in [their] heart (Deuteronomy 8:2).” In fact, the parallels between Jesus and the Israelites are more than coincidental. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Jesus would be faithful to God where the Israelites had rebelled. And in the next verse, he would be shown to be the obedient Son of God. While the Spirit does not tempt Jesus, the Spirit leads Jesus into the place of testing where he would, in fact, be tempted.

Both Moses and Elijah fasted for forty days and nights (Exodus 34:28, 1Kings 19:8). Likewise, Jesus fasted for forty days and nights and not surprisingly, Jesus was hungry. Deuteronomy 8:3 suggests that God used the hunger to see what was in the hearts of his people. It says, “He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna.” As Matthew records it, the devil tempted Jesus while he was most vulnerable, in this case to the physical weakness brought on by hunger and all of that was made possible by the leading of the Holy Spirit. And that brings us to Jesus’ first temptation.

Stones To Bread (vv 3-4)

And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” 4But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” The devil, now called the tempter, came to Jesus and immediately engages Jesus regarding his identity as the Son of God, which was revealed at his baptism in Matthew 3:17. The devil doesn’t call Jesus’ identity into question, but tries to define what it means for Jesus to be the Son of God. He does so first by tempting him to turn the stones into bread and satisfy his by-now significant hunger. So how would turning stones into bread be a sin against God? The devil tempts Jesus to use his power as the Son of God for his own comfort and ease, rather than to embrace the pain, sorrow, and suffering that were, in fact, a part of God’s will.

You’ll notice Jesus doesn’t get into a discussion with the devil, but dismisses the temptation by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, in which Moses describes the purpose of God testing Israel with physical hunger. It says, “He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to make you know that man does not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” In other words, Jesus dismissed the temptation to satisfy his physical hunger using his God-given authority because he recognized that his obedience to the will of God was far more important than the level of his hunger and physical discomfort. That’s precisely why in John 4:34, as Jesus’ disciples were urging him to eat, he said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.” Jesus would remain steadfast in his obedience to the Father no matter how difficult his life became.

Throw Yourself Down (vv 5-7)

5Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple 6and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” 7Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’

The devil, now called the tempter, said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” The devil now takes Jesus to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the temple, and again tries to define what it means for him to be the Son of God. He tells Jesus to throw himself down and then quotes portions of Psalm 91:11 and 12, which promise that God will bear up his children. Here the devil tempts Jesus not to satisfy his own desires, but to put himself in mortal danger and thus force God to prove the truth of his promises.

Again Jesus avoids a dialogue with the devil and simply quotes a portion of Deuteronomy 6:16 to him, in which Moses tells the Israelites, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” Jesus failed the test of obedience in the wilderness. They put God to the test and suffered the consequences accordingly. Jesus simply refused to do so. He implicitly trusted the will of God and would be obedient to that will no matter the cost, up to and including crucifixion. When Jesus was arrested and one of his disciples took a swing at the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear, Jesus said to him, “S2Put your sword back into its place… 53Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:52-53).” Truly Jesus had the authority to utilize the angels for his purposes, yet instead he chose obedience to the will of his Father.

Idolatry (vv 8-10)

8Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” 10Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” Wherein the devil took Jesus, it was a place from which he could see all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. The glory of the kingdoms of the world would include their wealth and beauty—everything they had to offer. In other words, the devil showed Jesus everything that the entire world had to offer in one place at one time and offered all of it to him if he would worship him.

This is an interesting way to tempt Jesus. God had already promised the messiah the wealth the devil somehow knew about. The wealth the devil didn’t know about was something that he was forbidden from en-