

“Thou Shalt Not Live by Food Alone”

Luke 4:1-13

Some of the best food the world has to offer isn't found in a fancy restaurant with white tablecloths and high prices. You won't see it being made with skill and fury on Iron Chef or Rachel Ray.

No, some of the world's best food is found in the same place you'll find cabs, newspaper stands, and crowds of people making their way to work. Some of the best food my fingers have grabbed, I found on the street.

Some of you who have complained to me about the high price of food in the Cleveland Clinic already know what I'm about to say. Try the lady street vendor on Euclid between the clinic and the parking garage. Her Italian sausage with Ballpark mustard and sauerkraut is out of this world. It makes it easy to forget the overpriced Big Mac on the inside. Better yet, when we travel to Germany, the open air beer gardens with German sausages.

But the best street food I've found was in Mexico City, where it is essential to the local culture. Fried dough covered in cinnamon. Roasted cobs of corn and freshly squeezed fruit juices. But my favorite is “tacos al pastor” which is hunks of marinated pork topped with pineapple and cooked gyro style on a spit until they're tender. Then chunks are sliced off and served on corn tortillas. Cilantro, chopped onion, and a squeeze of lime on top. It's delicious and it's cheap!

I know street food isn't the healthiest of foods, especially when compared to the

Wednesday night fare we're blessed with every year during this Lenten season. But I'm sure it would have sounded pretty good to a very hungry Jesus who has spent 40 days in the rocky hills of Israel. I'm sure his stomach was growling and a taco would have hit the spot.

But Jesus is prepping himself for a mission and so is in the midst of a fast. He's been purposely abstaining from food while in the wilderness to prepare himself for the 3 years of ministry and miracles as humanity's Messiah, as our Savior.

But instead of a tempting street vendor in Cleveland, Munich, or Mexico City, Jesus crosses paths with Satan himself. Knowing Jesus is feeling weak and hungry, he nudges up next to Jesus, saying, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become fried dough covered in cinnamon."

In other words, "Hey, Jesus, if you're hungry and you're God, then what are you waiting for? How about a little street food? You fry the bread and I'll provide the cinnamon." Tempting for sure.

Just like Jesus, you and I know what it's like to be tempted. We know what it's like to have a hunger for something we want; something that others say we need; but we know if we give in, it will only distract or derail us.

Click on that questionable web-site. Spend those extra dollars. Gossip behind the back of a co-worker or family member. Sleep in Sunday and even miss 11:00 worship. Eat the doughnut. Ignore the kids. The list is endless. Temptation is everywhere. Like the smell of great street food when your stomach is empty, its pull is strong. The truth is that Jesus isn't the

only one who has Satan whispering in his ear.

We know the story of Adam and Eve giving in to Satan's temptation in the garden. We know temptation is a part of God's planet and a part of our everyday life together. We also know from today's text and other scripture readings that Jesus was the only person to overcome temptation and who "knew no sin."

It says in 1 Peter 5:8 that the "devil is prowling around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour." If Satan can lure us in with subtle temptation or overt crazy sin, he'll do it. Just look at Jesus. If the devil is bold enough to try to tempt the Son of God, he surely isn't intimidated by you or me.

Now temptation, like street food, comes in countless forms. But no matter how you and I are tempted, Satan's goal is always the same: to pull us away from God in exchange for a self-centered life of gratifying ourselves. This is the tactic he tried with Jesus.

"Hey, J.C., forget about following the plans of your Father. Feed your stomach instead. Stop submitting as a son. Instead, bow to me and grab some glory for yourself. Why do you trust God in the first place? Jump from these heights and see what he'll do for you."

The goal of temptation is to pull us away from God's mission for us, just as Satan tried to pull Jesus away from his mission of self-sacrifice. He wants us to walk through life scratching every sinful itch and ultimately just gratifying ourselves. The hope is that if he can get you or I to do it enough, he can get us off God's team altogether.

So what are we to do? The monks and nuns have always argued that the best defense is

to barricade your life from as many evil influences as possible. Cancel the cable. Pull the plug on the computer. Home-school the kids and start making your own clothes and raising your own food. Pull away from society and you'll stay far from temptation.

The only problem is that Satan followed Jesus into the wilderness and he'll follow you and I, too. We cannot run away from or barricade ourselves from temptation. So what do we do?

In our gospel text we see that Jesus decides to fight temptation in a very specific way. He didn't assert his power, although he could have. He didn't flee, although it was an option. Instead, Jesus fought temptation with truth. He fought temptation with the truth of God's word.

When tempted with food, Jesus answered him, "It is written, one does not live by bread alone."

When tempted with power, Jesus answered him, "It is written, worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

When tempted with flying, Jesus answered him, "It is said, Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

With each offer, Jesus answered with the Word of God. As temptation tries to pull us from God, our lifeline is the truth of God – the Word of God.

When temptation shades our eyes and clouds our minds, God's Word is a "lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path" in Psalm 119.

It makes sense for Jesus to respond with God's Word. It makes sense for us to follow his

example. How can we fight temptation or even know that we're being tempted if we don't know God's expectations – if we don't know God's truth. This is one reason why the study of scripture is so important in the life of a Christian. It's so we can see the lies, hold to the truth, stay on mission, and steer away from sin. Then we can join with Jesus in fighting temptation with God's Word.

Jesus didn't budge under the pressure of temptation. He didn't sway. He endured. Jesus succeeded while we fall down everyday. That is why we needed Jesus so that through him we can be restored to God; we can be reconciled to God. During his time in the wilderness, Jesus was living the struggles and temptations of you and me and being faithful in our place so that we can be made right with God. So when you and I fall to temptation and prove ourselves unfaithful, we can hold on to the faithfulness of Jesus.

When we repent, we can cry out to God, saying, "I have fallen, but your Son is strong. I am rebellious, but he is obedient. Forgive me for his sake, and set me again on his path." As sure as there are amazing tacos on the streets of Mexico City, there is forgiveness, there is mercy, and there is abundant grace for you and for me.

Temptation like street food, comes in countless forms. And man, it can look and smell real good. But just because we're hungry for it doesn't mean we need it. May we model the strength of Jesus. May we run to the truth like Jesus. But most of all, when we fall, may we feast on the forgiveness found in Jesus.

Let us pray. Gracious God, we understand that temptation is unavoidable. We ask that

you would grant us eyes to spot the lies and a heart full of truth. Give us the strength to choose real, lasting, life-giving food found in your Word. Thank you most of all for giving us your Son, our Savior, and our only hope, Jesus Christ. Thank you for his obedience on our behalf.

Amen.

May the peace of God . . .

#319 - O Lord, Throughout These Forty Days