

Read also Isaiah 65:17-25. Check out the service, which is recorded on www.fpcd.org. The Scriptures and the music in the service support and illumine the message of this sermon.

Do you believe Satan exists?

The choir sang:

When I was a baby child, good and bad was just a game . . . *but* . . .
Many years and many trials, they proved to me they're not the same

Good and bad . . . good and evil. Is there such a thing as evil? The devil? These words introduce a song that says, "*Shut the door, keep out the devil.*" For indeed the Bible says there is a devil.

Do you believe that? In this age of science and sophistication, do you feel ill at ease talking about Satan as if he is a definable entity? Do you think it's laughable to consider the devil?

The choir sang:

Oh, Satan is an evil charmer
He's hungry for a soul to hurt
And without your holy armor
He will eat you for dessert

The Bible supports that song. Hear the Word of the Lord:

The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him (Mark 1:12-13).

There's no explanation. Mark doesn't elaborate. It's almost as if he says Jesus woke up, went out, and Satan attacked, as if it was normal, expected, and all in a day's work. The other gospels talk about the attack. To Mark it seemed routine. For some people in New Testament times, demonic interference was a part of everyday life. Hear the Word of the Lord: READ Mark 1:21-28.

Do you believe in a real devil?

People in ancient times did not have a problem with delving into the world of the supernatural. Are there some parts of the Bible that we just simply do not take seriously, or we simply say, "These things are better described psychologically." Do you believe the Bible's concept of demon activity in the real world is valid?

Hear the Word of the Lord: READ Mark 1:32-34.

Jesus obviously believed there is a spirit world that included a demonic presence and he had no problem eradicating the demons.

After Jesus was baptized and the Holy Spirit descended on Him, "the Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert for forty days where Jesus was tempted by Satan," writes Mark. Three of the gospel accounts tell us this. The other two accounts are different, as they focus on the nature of the

temptations. Mark does not. But one thing they agree on is this: as soon as Jesus was baptized Satan showed up.

The Bible treats Satan as a real entity; distinct and independent, but not God's equal.

And, in the Bible, the devil is opportunistic.

In the Garden of Eden, after God created the world, who showed up?

- The snake, who tempted Adam and Eve to distrust God

When the children of Israel were in the desert and thirsty for water, who showed up?

- The evil one, who hardened their heart in complaint against God

When Job lived a life of integrity, fearing God and staying away from evil, who showed up?

- Satan, accusing and blasting Job before God

When people questioned Peter about his association with Jesus on the night He was arrested, who showed up?

- The devil, who sifted him like sand

When you get up in the morning in faith, loving the Lord, striving to live to please Him, who shows up?

- You got it! Satan and his demons, who are alive and active on this earth.

So Jesus' ministry begins and the devil showed up. This is not surprising. We have an enemy.

But Jesus was ready because Jesus came to the earth to take Satan on, to conquer him, and reclaim what belongs to God.

Promised by God, Jesus comes to defeat Satan and his forces, pointing to the arrival of the Kingdom of God. The battle will be great; a mortal conflict that begins right in the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Satan stands against all that God does. So we must not be naïve, but understand the wiles of the devil, and learn to recognize his voice.

Satan said to Adam and Eve, "God is not to be trusted. You better think for yourself." Have you heard that voice? When you begin to draw closer to God, maybe you hear Satan say, "Better not trust; He might not come through."

Satan's voice accuses you. For example, when talking to God about Job, Satan said, "Job only loves you because you give him stuff. If you take away all his blessings – his family, his house, his health – he will not love you."

Satan tempts you to trust in yourself for security. In the desert the children of Israel were tempted to complain against God, and they did – demanding to go back to Egypt, rather than trust God to provide food and water.

Do you worry and complain against God when you don't have enough? Or do you get down on your knees and say, "You are a faithful God and I know you see me. You are a loving God and I know you will provide for me. You will not leave me barren and dry.

Satan tempts you to seek personal ambition and success. Peter did not want Jesus to go to the cross. James and John wanted to sit at his right and his left, thinking that power not service would fulfill them.

Jesus experienced all these temptations. The devil told Jesus,

- "Worship me and I will make you king of the earth."
- He said, "You hungry? Turn these stones into bread."
- He said, "Live dangerously and expect God to protect you."

Jesus experienced all these temptations and so will you.

- You will be tempted to focus on material things to fill your desires.
- You will be tempted to seek success and status to make you feel satisfied.
- You will be tempted to live dangerously and expect God to protect you.

But Jesus was spiritually wise.

- He knew material things come and go and that there's more to life. So He said, "Humans do not live by bread alone."
- He knew power and ambition corrupt, and lead to little satisfaction. He needed to trust God's way to become king.
- He knew better than to put God to the test.

So when Adam and Eve didn't believe, and the children of Israel didn't trust, and Peter, James, and John had to learn the hard way, and you and I fail and forget and fall again and again . . . Jesus did not sin.

And that makes all the difference.

Jesus our High Priest understands because He Himself was tempted in every way, therefore He is able to help those who are being tested. (see Heb. 2:17-18)

How does he help us?

He has provided the church, the Word, worship, prayer, and one another. To resist Satan:

1. Come to church (Satan hates church but you are nourished by worship)
2. Sing a song of praise (Martin Luther says Satan hates music)
3. Apply the Word. We "do not live by bread alone, but by the word of God" (Matt 4:4).
4. Pray (Satan hates prayer). Paul said, "Pray in the Spirit at all times; be alert and always persevere" (Eph 6:18).
5. Resist the devil and he will flee from you— James 4:7

Why does Mark tell us nothing about the temptation but only talks of Jesus being with the wild animals and the angels taking care of him? Mark is pointing us back to Genesis, to peace between humans and animals, and the time when angels provided food for Adam and Eve. Jesus restores the way things were meant to be.

Adam fell into temptation against an enemy who was too strong for him. But Jesus, our high priest, was tempted and did not fail. He overcame Satan and thus has the power to save us and He restores peace.

Are you beginning to see the power of Jesus, who sides with us, to conquer the devil?

God is at work restoring us through Jesus. It's a work of triumph.

Through Isaiah God says, "Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth, and no one will even think about the old ones anymore. Be glad; rejoice forever in my creation!" (65:17-18)

AMEN