

CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH

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FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

February 22, 2026

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Saint Matthew 4:1-11

In nomine Jesu!

For Martin Luther and those who follow his line of thinking, the existential problem is death. To him, everything else happens, from global catastrophe to a hangnail, are products of death. Luther calls things like sickness, pain, loss, intimate breakups, failing an exam, fiscal ruin – the list is endless – “little deaths.” In my own Lutheran shorthand, all of these are signs of God’s NO. Many of us earthlings do almost anything, make almost any deal with anyone to avoid the time of no or, at the very least, postpone it.

That impulse is what the New Testament writers call “temptation.”

The “anyone” we’re willing to make a deal with? They personified as “the devil.”

Whenever we’re willing to do anything to avoid even those “little deaths,” or transfer their effects to another, we are, in biblical terms, in the grips of the devil; in the same situation Jesus found himself in when after his baptism he was “led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested...” None of us need to accept the concept of a personified devil to experience this. What the ancients called “the devil” we might call “self-interest;” “enlightened self-interest” if we’re in a self-justifying mood. Different name, same effect. We do not want to experience the time of no; we want out. And, in this and any other time of no, our motivating response is fear.

This is a time of no. We see it everywhere. We feel it in our bones. A time of countless “little deaths,” during which many peoples’ actions are motivated by fear. A time when all too many are willing to do almost anything, make almost any deal with anyone, blame almost anyone, or remain silent purely out of fear. Just consider what fuels the tension, the angst, we feel every moment of every day. For 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus was immersed in a time of no. “He was famished,” Matthew tells us. Everywhere he looked, everything he heard, everything he experienced was an incessant no.

No bread to eat. No companion with whom to share. In this context, the devil, or if you prefer, Jesus' thoroughly human impulse for self-preservation, began its incessant communication.

Now the impulse here is to say that Jesus simply responded by quoting Scripture; and the running myth in much of our society is that Jesus mentally rifled through his cerebral Scriptures until he landed on the appropriate passage and, if only we could do that, everything would be hunky-dory. But Jesus is a bit more precise than that. In his time of no, Jesus clung to God's Word of YES – "the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness."

We are living in a time of no. We know it. All around us, even among us, many are tempted to do anything, deal with anyone, fix blame on someone else, or keep our mouth shut until we get out of this time of no. Jesus shows us a better, more effective, way; a way to believe and trust and live – faithfully and fearlessly as he did, as if we are living in God's YES time, which is precisely where Jesus leads us today. After their extended conversation, Matthew tells us, "the devil left him." Telling the same story, Luke says "the devil left him 'until an opportune time,'" the "kairotic time" when God acts *for us* decisively.

We know that time. We're on our way to celebrate it right now. Jesus' time on the cross. Jesus' time in the tomb. Jesus' time which in Christ is now our time when Christ's tomb is empty, when Christ, raised from death's no, lives and reigns for us forever.

This is a time of no, when fear, blame, "them," and the cruelty that springs from fear motivates or silences too many of us; when the temptation is to do almost anything, blame almost anyone, make almost any deal until this time of no is passed. In Lent, God reminds us of and renews in us, God's baptismal promise to keep us, now and forever, in God's YES time; a time in which, clinging to God's YES, we refuse to allow any intimidation, threat, or coercion, to have any power over us. Today, Jesus leads us on a way he has traveled before. The way of the cross. The way of God's YES. Christ's way for us to we together, living not fearfully for ourselves, but boldly for others, which is exactly the way God deals decisively with the power of death.

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