

Zion Lutheran Church • Fairbanks, Alaska
Food for the Journey: Pastor Joe's Weekly Devotion
September 26, 2007

Matthew 4:1-11 – *The Temptation of Christ*

If. It's such a small word, but it contains so much power and influence. Back when I was first learning about computers, we were taught BASIC programming. Two of the most used words were "if" and "then." If a particular word was typed, then a particular response was given. If. Then. "If" is a powerful word. It's a trust word. When the word if is used, doubt, conditionals, suspicion arise.

Satan approaches Jesus. "If," he says. "If you are the Son of God..." In other words, prove it. These words fall on the heels of the words of God Himself, who proclaims Jesus to be His son. So, Satan is trying to cast doubt in the human mind of Jesus as to whether his own father can be trusted. "If..."

Some people worry a lot. One of their favorite phrases is, "well, what if..." What if it rains? What if you get a flat tire? What if I stop breathing when I'm asleep? What if...? "If" can paralyze. "If" can make you freeze up when faced with a challenge. What if they won't like me? What if I'm wrong? What if I mess it up?

Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, iffed quite a bit. "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." (Matthew 14:28) If it is you. "If" is hesitation. "If" is doubt. But even the most prominent of the disciples "iffed."

"If you are the Son of God..." Have you ever prayed the "If" prayer? "God, IF you're up there..." "God, IF you had been here..." "If you had just done things my way..." IF. What are the "ifs" you have about God? It is no easy thing to rid yourself of the "ifs."

God sends His Holy Spirit to rid us of the "ifs." He replaces "if" with an equally simple word, "is." Jesus responds to Satan, "It IS written..." God speaks of Jesus, "this IS my Son." He chooses each of us and says, "You ARE my child." There are no "ifs" about us in God's eyes. At Easter, we proclaim, "Christ IS risen! He IS risen indeed." No "ifs" there. In the absolution, the pastor says, "Your sins ARE forgiven." No ifs. At the Lord's Supper, Jesus says, "This IS my body." No ifs. Even God's own name, in Exodus and throughout Scripture, "I AM."

It's no small matter to trust. In fact, without the Holy Spirit in our lives, we couldn't do it at all. And it's ok to think deep thoughts about the nature of God and us and the world. But, be sure of this, God was, IS, and always will be. Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever. No ifs about it.

Heavenly Father, you ARE my God. Forgive the times when doubt rises in my heart with all of the "ifs." Let your word sink deep into my heart and dwell there, guiding all of my life. Dispel the "ifs" with your true word. Through Christ, amen.