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As we begin Lent, Luke tells us a story in which the challenge of tempting Jesus makes the devil so desperate that he actually imitates Jesus and quotes Scripture to induce him to betray his identity and vocation. Granted, the devil had exhausted two other approaches before resorting to mimicking his adversary. But being dead-set on his objective, poor old "Doby" (short for the Greek name *Diabolos*) dug into his enemy's treasure chest of wisdom in a last-ditch attempt to trip up Jesus.

First Sunday of Lent

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Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Psalms 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15

Romans 10:8-13

Luke 4:1-13

Using Psalm 91, Doby said, in effect, "If God is all powerful and really loves you, nothing bad can happen to you, right? So prove it! Play Superman and take a single bound off our tallest building! I want to see the response of those old angels I used fly with!"

Jesus answered as he had before — quoting the Scripture that Doby hated most because he knew why it was true: "You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test." Perhaps Doby remembered what he had learned when his best work with Job inadvertently generated Job's own growth in wisdom and holiness.



(Mark Bartholomew)

We should give the devil his due. Tempting Jesus was the challenge of a lifetime. Adam and Eve had been an easy practice round, but his work with them did set the ball rolling for a history of jealousy, hiding and lying — and the death and destruction those inevitably lead to. But confronting Jesus was the real deal. Now, everything Doby had learned for thousands of years was coming to a head.

Doby's first tack was to pervert the idea of being Son of God. Demoting the concept of sonship to the level of aristocratic entitlement, he suggested that Jesus should never have an unsatisfied appetite.

Jesus' response doesn't deny human hungers, but informs Doby of a truth that the poor know well: There are things in life even more important than bread.

When he couldn't entice Jesus on the level of physical gratification, Doby turned to power. Now, he wasn't talking to Adam who wanted to taste an apple, but the Adam

who lusted to be as great as God. Luke gets in an extra lick against domination by quoting Doby's claim to have the right to distribute the power that rulers exert over others.

In reply to Doby's offer of control, Jesus replies that he believes in an entirely different sort of power, and that he will dedicate himself to nothing and no one other than God. That consecration will be such a source of power and freedom that nothing else will ever entice him to accept less.

Doby took normal human desires and blew them out of proportion in such a way that pursuing a natural good deteriorated into a perversion of the human vocation to love God and neighbor. When Jesus rejected the temptation to turn stones to bread, he rejected both the opportunity to devote his power to his own satisfaction and the impulse to feed the hungry without converting those who hoard the world's goods.

His rejection of coercive power was proof of his great love and respect for humankind. Like God, he sought to increase human freedom as the only atmosphere in which real love can grow.

In the third round, Doby used a quote from Psalm 91 to undermine the very purpose of prayer and covenant. His suggestion was that Jesus should attempt to manipulate God by attempting to force God into action. Jesus' response was that God expresses love on divine terms, not according to a puny human agenda.

Each of the Evangelists preserved this story for us with his own emphases and rationale. Mark's, as usual, is the starkest, and Matthew's has its own rhythm as the temptations build. Luke puts Jerusalem at the climax of this story, just as he organizes his Gospel as Jesus' road to Jerusalem and climax of his death and resurrection. What are we to take away from it?

Jesus' temptations centered on how he would assume and grow in his identity as God's beloved, fully human son. The temptations to selfishness, power and manipulating God were surely as real in his life as they are in our own.

This scene in the desert reminds us that the powers of evil never tire of offering cheap, attractive and corrupt ways to fulfill our real human needs for sustenance, self-expression and genuine relationship with God and others. The Son of God chose to enter into the struggle. Lent is our annual opportunity to do the same.

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Editor's note: *This Sunday Scripture commentary was originally published in the January 2019 issue of [Celebration](#), a comprehensive pastoral resource. To read the full version of the commentary, click [here](#). Sign up to receive [weekly Scripture for Life emails](#).*

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