

Carrying the Bible
Matthew 4:1-11

Sermon Point: Lutheran Christians haven't always carried their Bibles around. It's smelled of self-righteousness. But carrying our Bibles helps us become more comfortable with using it and being public Christians—people who trust and follow Jesus. We will encourage you to bring your Bible to church especially this Lent.

We can recognize a wide variety of smells. Some smells can stir up memories. *Collect several items that have distinctive smells such as: lemon | orange peel | cedar wood | perfume soaked cotton | banana | pine needles | chocolate | coffee | dirt | vanilla | garlic | onion | mint vinegar | moth balls | rose flowers | saw dust | ginger | peppermint | pencil shavings | potato chips. Keep the items separated and enclosed in plastic containers so that the odors do not mix. Punch holes in the top of the containers and ask the children: (1) Identify the item by smell. (2) Rate the odor (strong, pleasant, neutral, [bad or good for young kids]) (3) Tell about any memories associated with the smells.*¹ Your nose has been trained over many experiences to detect and distinguish these smells.

Throughout this season of Lent, we're asking you to bring your Bibles to church so we can learn to sniff out God's Word as Law and Gospel. Just as it has taken many experiences to learn the differences between smells, we need many experiences with the Bible to be able to accurately detect the difference between Law and Gospel. We each need to practice with it in our hands, struggling with the scripture to learn how to trust and follow Jesus. We're doing this in part because it is the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and one of the gifts that Martin Luther gave to the Church is translating the Bible into ordinary people's language and encouraging individuals to read and study it.

Today, we're going to be working with Matthew's gospel, chapter 4. Matthew is the first book in the New Testament. Now not all of us will have the same page number or words because the New Testament was originally written in Greek and has been now translated into many different English translations. Each English translation is a bit different because they have different audience's and purposes. For example, we normally read from the New Revised Standard Version, which was one of the updates of updates of the King James Version. At the 11am service, we read from Eugene Peterson's translation called "the Message," which is easier to read (in some ways) because he wanted it to sound like the way 21st century people talk

So, if you have found Matthew chapter 4, please love your neighbor by helping them find it.

We've talked about this before, but the first thing we should look for in the Bible is what God is doing, or in this case, what Jesus is doing. (Jesus is fully God and fully human; God in the flesh.) We always want to focus first and longest on what God is doing before we think about what we should do. We need to look for the Gospel: "we are saved by Christ alone through faith."

¹ <https://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/chsmell.html>

Let's go verse by verse. In verse 1, we ask: what is Jesus doing? Jesus is being led up by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil. So, in your Bible, circle "Jesus was led up." This should strike us: Jesus being led by the Spirit—not to go teach or heal, the things Jesus does elsewhere—but to be tempted by the devil. The first thing Jesus has to face is the devil's temptations. This shows us that (1) Jesus is obedient and willing to be led and (2) that the central problem Jesus faces is the devil and the devil's desire to turn people's hearts from God. Jesus obediently goes to face the devil, a confrontation that would send us quaking in our boots and running in the opposite direction, but the Gospel is that Jesus faces the devil for us. "We are saved by Christ alone from the devil—and we trust that!"

Let's practice our sniff test: It's Law if we read verse 1 to mean we should be doing something. If someone says, "We should go into the wilderness to wrestle with the devil," we should sniff: that smells like the Law and not the Gospel. Calling it "Law" doesn't mean it's bad, only that it doesn't save. Saint Anthony went out into the desert to pray and wrestle with the devil, but that doesn't mean everyone has to do it.

In verse 2, Jesus fasted 40 days and forty nights and was hungry. Circle "Jesus fasted" and "he was famished." Just reflect on that for a moment. What does this say about Jesus? If Jesus obediently going to face the devil is something we find difficult to imagine, we can imagine how hungry he would be after 40 days. Jesus is not some superhero like Captain America or Superman never seemingly has to eat. Jesus is a human being like you or I who needs food and is hungry after fasting.

What does it smell like if someone says, "Because Jesus fasted for 40 days, you should fast for 40 days of Lent"? Sniff, sniff—smells like Law. Again, it doesn't mean the Law is bad—the Law is good! Fasting is a good discipline that God uses to help change our desires. But fasting doesn't save—only Jesus.

Verse 3 shows the devil, now called the tempter talking to Jesus. Jesus doesn't act—he listens. So, just circle "to him." Jesus hears the devil. Here Matthew helps us by exposing the devil's tricks. We should not be surprised when the devil comes to us in a time of weakness and whispers in our ear, "don't trust God in your time of trouble, he's abandoned you. Take matters into your own hands!" When we are strong we become boastful that we've accomplished so much, and the devil whispers, "You've done it without God—you don't need God." But even more the devil tempts us when we are weakest. The good news is that when we face the tempter's voice, we can be confident that Jesus also has heard that voice—and he has resisted.

What if someone says, "Oh, you're a bad Christian if you don't trust God when you are weak!" What do you smell? It's Law, not Gospel. It's true we are weak—that's why we trust Jesus who heard the tempter and was victorious!

Read verse 4 now and ask yourself: who is Jesus in this verse? Circle "He answered." What is the Gospel here? Jesus quotes the Hebrew Bible, "one shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." If you look in your footnotes, you should see where this passage is found. For our purposes today, you don't need to know that. The Gospel here is that God's Word feeds our deepest needs. We don't live on bread alone, but every word from God—and the most important word is the Word made flesh, Jesus! We are saved—meaning nourished and fed spiritually and physically—by the Word of God above everything else. That's good news! We can eat more or less. We can fast or not fast—and all the time be confident that we live by God's Word, who is Jesus!