

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH**  
**SUNDAY, MARCH 9, 2025**  
**SERMON: THE DESERTED HOTEL**  
**SCRIPTURE: LUKE 4:1-13**  
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**Luke 4:1-13**

**4** Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, **2** where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

**3** The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”

**4** Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”

**5** The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. **6** And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. **7** If you worship me, it will all be yours.”

**8** Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”

**9** The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. **10** For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you

to guard you carefully;

**11** they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

**12** Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

**13** When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

**Sermon: The Deserted Hotel**

Last year during Lent, I encouraged you all to fast in reflection of this passage where Jesus fasts in the desert while being tempted by the devil. Did anyone actually do that?

If not, that’s okay—because the opportunity to align your spiritual practice with Jesus’ practice in this chapter of Luke comes up every year at this time. This is another sermon encouraging you to step into that challenge. I’ve personally been fasting consistently for Lent for the last 13 years, and it has become one of the most spiritually important seasons of my year.

My own fasting practice has been shaped by my years in the Middle East, where the majority of the population participates in an intense month-long fast on the Islamic calendar called Ramadan. (And right now, both the Islamic fast of Ramadan and the Christian fast of Lent are happening at the same time.) In this fast, Muslims don’t eat food, drink water (that’s right—no

**water**), listen to music, curse, smoke, or engage in sexual activity from sunrise to sunset. Here in Hawaii, that's about 12 hours a day without any physical sustenance.

As I mentioned last year, I usually participate in fasting this way alongside my husband, but this year, for medical reasons, I am refraining. Even so, I want to encourage you to consider fasting—not just in the traditional sense, but in a way that challenges you spiritually.

I recognize that not everyone can endure the kind of fast Jesus did in the wilderness, or even the fast of our Muslim neighbors. But there is a kind of fasting that all of us can do, no matter our age or physical condition—fasting from cursing.

Now, you might think, *"Pastor, I've been a Christian for a long time. The Lord has already trained my mouth not to speak blasphemous or terrible words."*

And that's great! Maybe it's already second nature to you not to throw an f-bomb into conversation when you're frustrated.

But today, I want to take a closer look at what it truly means to "curse"—and why refraining from it is a spiritual practice as meaningful as fasting from food or water.

When we think of cursing, we usually think of bad words, insults, or expressions of anger. But refraining from cursing is about more than just keeping our language clean. It's about resisting the deeper temptations the devil lays before us—the temptations of power, comfort, or glory.

Think about Jesus in the wilderness. He was weak with hunger, exhausted from the desert heat, vulnerable. Yet when the devil offered him food, dominion over all the kingdoms of the world, and even the chance to prove himself as God's Son in a grand spectacle, he refused.

Jesus did not curse—not in words, but in action. He didn't give in to greed, spite, or pride. And that is what fasting from cursing is really about.

It is easy to resist these temptations when we are comfortable, when life is going smoothly. But when we feel stretched beyond what we think we can bear, this is when our true character is tested.

I'll provide an example. Some of you may remember my friend Natan, the Israeli journalist who Zoomed in to speak during the Holy Land Bible Series in October 2023. This story is about the time when he and his friend Yukon visited me in Jordan.

It was the early days of the Syrian Civil War, and they were beginning their Yom Kippur fast (again, another example of fasting as a deep spiritual practice across traditions). They wanted to fulfill their Jewish obligation of giving penance money to those in need, so they traveled to Jordan to help Syrian refugees.

Together, Hamza, Natan, Yukon, and I drove from Amman to the Syrian border with the money they had collected. We found a group of about thirty Syrians living in an abandoned hotel off a

remote desert highway—very likely in the same desert where Jesus had been tempted 2,000 years earlier.

We knew refugees often hid in such places to avoid being sent to overcrowded UN camps. When we arrived, the atmosphere was one of quiet dignity. We sat with them, drank coffee, exchanged pleasantries, and made a list of their most urgent needs—diapers, blankets, water filters, and medical supplies. Then, we drove 45 minutes to the nearest city and bought everything on the list.

But when we returned three hours later, the scene had changed dramatically. The thirty people we had met had somehow become over a hundred. The quiet conversations over coffee had turned into desperation. People rushed our car, grabbing at us, grabbing at the supplies, shouting and crying. In the chaos, a man held a knife to Hamza's throat and demanded all of his cash, which Hamza threw at him and freed himself. We managed to escape, throwing everything we had from the car—including what little was left in our wallets—and speeding away as fast as we could.

I sometimes share this story when talking about working with vulnerable populations not to dissuade anyone from acts of charity, but to highlight what desperation does to people. When we first met those refugees, they were composed and polite. But when their survival instincts took over, they reacted in ways they never would have under normal circumstances.

And this is something that could happen to any of us. If everything were stripped away—our homes, our security, our food—how would we respond? Would we still be able to hold onto our faith? Or would we curse—by choosing fear, greed, or self-preservation over righteousness?

This is exactly why Jesus' refusal to give in to temptation in the wilderness is so powerful. He was starving, exhausted, and vulnerable. Yet he refused to curse God and give into the temptation. He refused to let go of his faith.

This is why fasting matters. It is not just about abstaining from food or drink—it is about training ourselves to rely on God even when we feel weak. It is about preparing ourselves for the moments when we will be tempted to curse—to give in to greed, to let pride drive us, to take the easy path instead of the righteous one.

I pray that none of you ever experience the level of desperation those refugees did. But fasting allows us to step, even briefly, into the reality of those who do—those for whom hunger is not a choice, but a daily struggle. The world is filled with suffering, and when we willingly enter into discomfort, we begin to understand, even in the smallest way, what it means to be in need. That understanding is what fuels true compassion, the kind that moves us not just to feel, but to act. Jesus calls us to be part of bringing the Kingdom of Heaven—a kingdom where no one is left hungry, where suffering is met with love, and where our faith drives us to meet the needs of others, not from a place of pity, but from a heart that truly understands.

So this Lent, I encourage you again to fast—not just from food, but from cursing in the deepest sense. Resist the temptation to let your circumstances dictate your faith. When you feel weak,

remember Jesus in the desert. When you are tempted, remember that true strength comes from God. And may that reliance shape us into people who follow Jesus not just in times of abundance, but in times of trial.

May we be a people who, even in suffering, still trust. Who, even in weakness, still hold fast to God. Who, even in the wilderness, refuse to curse—but instead, walk faithfully toward the promise of God’s Kingdom.

Amen.