

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Lent 1A
March 1, 2020
Matthew 4:1-11

Overcoming Temptation

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1 ESV)

Dear Beloved of Christ Jesus,

We have entered the holy season of Lent, a time we especially focus on sin and repentance. For without sin, there is no need for a Savior. Yet, sin didn't just spring up on its own, out of the blue, but was the result of temptation. That's what we learn from today's Old Testament reading (Gen. 3:1-21). We also hear today how Jesus, as the Savior promised to Adam and Eve, endures and overcomes temptation for us, without falling into sin. God grant that we learn to recognize temptation to sin as the serious matter that it is, and that we look to Christ for strength to resist temptation and for forgiveness when we fail.

Having heard how Adam and Eve plunged the world into sin, we see in Jesus a replay and reversal of the temptation of our first parents in paradise. There the tempter enticed Eve with the forbidden fruit and the prospect of being "like God." He cast doubt on God's Word and goodness, even calling God a liar. And Adam and Eve both gave in to the temptation, ate the forbidden fruit, thus casting God's good world into sin, chaos, unbelief, despair, and death.

Temptation is such a serious matter, our Lord Jesus teaches us to pray: "Lead us not into temptation." We learned in the catechism, "God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory."

Luther says in the Large Catechism, "We live in the flesh and carry the old creature around our necks; it goes to work and lures us daily into unchastity, laziness, gluttony and drunkenness, greed and deceit, into acts of fraud and deception against our neighbor. All this often wounds and inflames even an innocent heart." (LC, III:102).

How does this work in your life? Day by day, hour by hour that little sinner that lives inside you lures you into many sins. Perhaps, like Adam and Eve, you too want to be "like God" if not be God yourself. You want to be the authority who determines right from wrong. You do whatever you want to do. Or maybe it's simply a desire to eat too much, drink too much alcohol, abuse drugs, gossip, lust for someone not your spouse, think poorly of others, even judging them.

Next we consider that the world also entices you to sin. Again Luther says, the world “assails us by word and deed and drives us to anger and impatience. In short, there is in it nothing but hatred and envy, enmity, violence and injustice, perfidy [treacherousness, deceitfulness, untrustworthiness, disloyalty], vengeance, cursing, reviling, slander, arrogance, and pride, along with fondness for luxury, honor, fame, and power. For no one is willing to be the least, but everyone wants to sit on top and be seen by all.” (LC, III:103).

The world despises you because you love and confess Christ. The world would much rather teach you to follow your own pride and seek your own fame. And, like little pieces of filet mignon, you and I baste in the poisonous juices of this proud, arrogant, evil, corrupt world. You are constantly tempted to get along with the world, approving what God clearly condemns, and most of the time that means downplaying your faith and confession of Christ and keeping Him and God’s Word on the sideline of life.

Then, of course, there’s the devil himself. Again Luther helps, “Then comes the devil, who baits and badgers us on all sides, but especially exerts himself where the conscience and spiritual matters are concerned. His purpose is to make us scorn and despise both the Word and the works of God, to tear us away from faith, hope, and love, to draw us into unbelief, false security, and stubbornness, or, on the contrary, to drive us to despair, denial of God, blasphemy, and countless other abominable sins.” (LC, III:104).

Whenever you are tempted to think and feel that God is not good, and even unfair, you can be sure that the devil is firing his fiery darts at you. Whenever you treat God’s Word lightly or think that you really don’t need to hear it, the devil is trapping you in his minefield. Whenever you think you don’t get anything out of the worship life of the Church, the devil has made a successful strike to keep you from enjoying Jesus and His blood-bought forgiveness. Remember what St. Peter said: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

In all this, it is not the temptations themselves that harm us, but our willing submission to them. We give place to them, sometimes even seeking them out.

Yet, our Lord Jesus, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true Man, born of the Virgin Mary, came to reverse this Fall. He came to do battle with Satan, win back God’s creation, and restore you to life with God. Today’s Gospel sets before us the battle between the prince of this world and the King of heaven. They engage in a brutal battle over you, your life, and your soul. Yet, Jesus wins the victory over sin, temptation, and the devil for you.

Beloved, let today’s Gospel of Jesus conquering temptation give you comfort, joy, and hope, for Jesus is the new Adam who succeeded for us, for all our failures. Satan entices hungry Jesus with food, but Jesus relies on “every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” When Satan uses God’s Word to lure Jesus into showing off His trust in God, Jesus refuses to test the Lord His God. And then Satan tempts Jesus with immediate glory without suffering, but Jesus

refused to misplace His worship. “You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only shall you serve.”

Notice how Jesus resisted the devil simply by using God’s Word. He had heard God call Him His beloved Son and Satan tempts Him to disbelieve it. By trusting His Father and wielding the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, Jesus overcame every one of Satan’s temptations. Thus He defeats the devil and wins the victory for you and in your place. Not only does He win the temptation battle in the wilderness, but He also wins the whole cosmic war by agonizing and bleeding and dying on the cross. You don’t need to give in to Satan’s hollow, empty promises, because Christ Jesus is your daily bread, His victory is your success, and He does reign over the whole world with His grace and mercy.

So when you are attacked by temptation, no matter the source, trust in the truth of God’s Word. For by that Word, that Gospel, you are strengthened to resist temptations and you are forgiven when you fall. This is no small matter! Through the washing of your Baptism you are made the “sons of God,” and that helps you deflect the doubts that Satan would try to plant in you. And through Christ’s Body and Blood “given to us Christians to eat and to drink,” you are nourished and fortified to trust His forgiveness and resist all temptations.

During the Lenten season remember that, “We Christians must be armed and expect every day to be under continuous attack.” (LC, III:109). However, your Lord and Savior has conquered the old satanic foe for you. He has overcome the world. When you pray to God “that [you] may finally overcome [temptations] and win the victory,” remember that Jesus has already answered your prayer. He has been tempted in every way you are, yet without sin. In His gory, bloody death, He won the eternal victory for you. In His life-giving, soul-strengthening water, Word, and meal, He sustains you in His victory over temptation. A mighty fortress is our God . . . the kingdom ours remaineth. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener