

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Lent 1A
February 26, 2023
Matthew 4:1-11; Genesis 3:1-21

Cross or Glory

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1-11 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, our victor over the devil and the only Savior of the world,

On this first Sunday in Lent, we see the grave danger into which our Baptism into Christ places us. For immediately after Jesus' baptism, He is led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. During those forty days and forty nights Jesus fasted, and, at the end, He was hungry and was tempted by the devil. Through it all He trusted His Father's Word and depended on Him for all things. After all, His Father had declared that Jesus was His Son. And that declaration carried with it the promise of care, protection, and all that He needed.

The same is true for you. In your Baptism God declared that *you* are His own dear child. He gave you Jesus' righteousness as your own and took away all your sins. The Holy Spirit was given to you to testify that you have peace with God. You were clothed with Christ. You were rescued from death and the devil and given eternal salvation. At that very moment, a bullseye was placed on you in the form of a cross on your forehead and on your heart.

And ever since, the devil has been out to get you, to cut you off from Jesus. He is constantly trying to get you to despair of God's mercy in Christ. "Did God really say you're His child?" "Does God really forgive *all* your sins? Even the really, really bad ones?" "Are you sure?" "If God really loved you, why does He let bad things happen to you? If He really loved you, why does He let you suffer?" And if that wasn't enough, he'll try, "How can you be God's child and do the bad things you do? How can you call yourself a Christian when you think, speak, and act so wickedly and with evil intent as you so often do?" He tries to set us against each other to devour one another by getting us to think of each other as enemies rather than fellow redeemed brothers and sisters in Christ. He tries to convince us that God is a liar, that He's unreliable, untrustworthy. He'll do whatever it takes to scare you into despair and unbelief, especially as death draws near.

Such are the temptations the devil uses against God's people, as he has from the beginning. In today's Old Testament reading and Gospel, we see that our true enemy is the devil himself and not flesh and blood. He's the same enemy who attacked and overcame Adam and Eve and led them into sin and brought death into the world. He convinced Eve that God was holding out on them by forbidding them to eat from a certain tree. He convinced Eve that trusting God and being obedient and faithful to His Word just wasn't working and that she

needed to do something about it. He convinced her that they could and should be like God, knowing good and evil. He led her away from trusting God and His Word and into trusting *his* word, taking things into her own hands and placing herself above God's Word. He raises questions about God's reliability, trustworthiness, and faithfulness. He calls God a liar. "Did God really say...?" "You will not surely die." Thus, he led her into idolatry, into loving and trusting in someone or something above God. Though he lied, Eve bit, followed by Adam. And the devil has been after God's people ever since.

But God wasn't finished. For He promised Adam and Eve that He would send a Savior, the Seed of the woman, who would crush the serpent's head, that is, He would destroy the devil's kingdom. And in the fulness of time, God sent forth His own dear Son to be born of the Virgin Mary. And immediately after Jesus was baptized by John, He is led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Again, the devil tries to get his temptee to doubt God's Word and to trust in Himself. "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." "If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down." "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." God had declared that Jesus was His Son, and it was so. The devil tried to raise doubts about that. But Jesus trusted His Father and His Word. "God said I'm His Son, and so I am. Besides, God said, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" And later, Jesus would say, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." (John 4:34). Such trust He had in His Father that despite fasting for forty days, Jesus trusted that His Father would provide Him bread at the proper time. And such trust would lead Him to the cross and to His resurrection.

Likewise, Jesus so trusted His Father that He didn't need to test Him to prove it. He didn't need to throw Himself off the pinnacle of the Temple. He simply believed and lived from His Father's Word. Besides, He needed to live so He could die on the cross for the sins of the world.

The third temptation was to go for the glory rather than the cross. And this is perhaps the most devilish temptation of all. After all, who enjoys pain and suffering? Who wouldn't rather have a life of luxury and ease than poverty and death? And here we see Jesus' keeping of the First Commandment at its finest. Jesus will worship no one but His Father. His life was about one thing, and that was His Father's will. And that will was that Jesus overcome the devil and his temptations and suffer and die for sinners, for you. And indeed, our forgiveness, life, and salvation depend on Jesus defeating Satan – in the wilderness and at the cross. For not only did Jesus suffer the physical torture of scourging and the cross; not only did He endure the humiliation and mocking of evil men; He also felt the crushing weight of the sins of the world and the horrible forsaken judgment of God upon sin. It's not just that Jesus is nailed to the gruesome cross, He is also being punished for *your* sins. And the devil says, "That can't be what it means to be the Son of God?" And Jesus says, "Father, Thy will be done! Satan begone!" And then with His triumphant death Jesus blotted out the sins of the world. He descends into hell to proclaim His victory once and for all and rises on the third day. From the temptations of the wilderness, to the tempting agony of the Garden, to the horrible temptation to abandon the cross and come down, Jesus holds fast and endures and fulfills the Father's will. And it is

that faithful obedience that saves us! Believe this: Jesus is tempted in the wilderness to defeat the devil **for you**. He clings to the Father's will in the Garden, **for you**. He endures the cross **for you**. And you are saved!

So, when your enemy, the devil, tempts you or accuses you, cling to God's promise given in your Baptism that you **are** His child in Christ. He says it. It is so. And when you do succumb to the devil's temptations and fall into sin, trust God's promise in Holy Absolution in which God Himself says your sins don't stand against you. When the evil one tries to drag you down by causing you to fear sickness, weakness, and death, then declare to him that Christ's own body and blood that you have eaten and drunk mean that your sins are forgiven and that you will be raised on the Last Day and have eternal life. Hang on to Christ for in His Word and Sacraments Jesus gives you all that He has done for you.

Beloved, you **do** have an enemy, an evil spirit intent on destroying you. He is mightier than you and full of wickedness. Never underestimate him! And never try to fight him with your own power, for you will surely fail. But you are not alone in this battle, for you are baptized into Christ and therefore a child of God. Christ has claimed you as His own by His own blood and water and the Word. You are His. Your Savior, Jesus Christ, is stronger than your enemy and has defeated him for you. By His death on the cross, Jesus has robbed Satan of his power. So, when you are tempted, when you fall into sin, when you doubt, and your conscience is pricked, don't try to figure out a way to fix it. Cling to Christ who has already answered for your sins. When the devil comes to claim that you are no child of God, then laugh in his face and point him to your Baptism, the Word, and Christ's Body and Blood. These will chase him away and remove his power over you. For you are Christ's! He has been tempted for you. He has suffered, died, and risen for you. And that makes you an eternal Son of God! God bless you always. Amen.

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

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener