

Looking For Life In All The Wrong Places

Luke 4:1-13

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

February 17, 2013 – First Sunday in Lent



In the name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. The season of Lent means lots of things to lots of people, but we Lutherans see it as a time to reflect and consider our standing before God – a time to ponder the fact that we haven't been the kind of persons God has called us to be – and more importantly, a time to recall our Baptism into Christ – the drowning of the sinful Old Adam by daily contrition and repentance – so that the new man, recreated by Christ Himself, might daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. For as Saint Paul writes – and as we all ought to confess – we were Baptized with Christ into His death, and raised with Him in His Resurrection.

But Baptism bestows and signifies much more than that. It reminds us how every aspect of our Lord's life has now become a part of who we are – which is why this morning's Gospel is so important, for *everything* Jesus did and suffered – including His temptation in the wilderness – wasn't done only for Himself, but rather for us, on our behalf, and for our sake. His defeat of Satan – both in the wilderness and ultimately on the Cross – wasn't simply an exercise of His Divine power and authority, but was, more importantly, an exercise of humble faith.

Jesus' Temptation recalls the testing of God's Israel in the wilderness where His people were disciplined over the course of forty years. So also Jesus, having just been declared the Beloved Son of God at His Baptism, was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness for forty days to be tested by Satan – where He accomplished what Israel had not been able to do – and what we can never hope to do. He overcame and defeated Satan. This Gospel, then, isn't about whether or not the devil could ever have actually lured Jesus into sinning – rather it's a portrayal of the very Son of God “who, in every respect was tested as we are, yet was without sin.” Where Israel failed miserably, Jesus passed the test – and this not simply as an “example” for us to follow, but as a victory – a victory He achieved in our place and on our behalf.

These are the things Jesus did throughout His life. He suffered all that you and I deserve by reason of our sin, and He accomplished everything we couldn't. And this He did by exercising a perfect faith – by living the life we were created and meant to live – not relying on, nor seeking glory for Himself, but trusting only in the Father and His Word, and receiving all things from His hand – including the Cup of suffering and the Cross of death. And the amazing thing is that through it all He was building up the faith and life which only He can give – by grace alone – by faith alone – and solely through God's Word and Spirit.

This is essential to understand, because not a one of us is able to fully appreciate what sin has done to us, or how insidiously it has us in its grasp. It's not that we're tempted to do this or that thing we know is “wrong” – which is how we usually think of temptation – but that behind every temptation to sin is something far worse. It's a deep doubt of the Word and Promises of God – and in particular, as it comes to us in Baptism. It's a skepticism of our sonship in Christ, a despising of Holy Absolution, and doubt as to whether Christ's body and blood are truly present in the Sacrament to bestow on us the forgiveness of sins. It's a denial and avoidance of His Holy Cross, and perhaps a suspicion of the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection! It's trusting in one's self, one's own wisdom, reason, strength and feelings – rather than trusting our heavenly Father for everything needed to sustain us in this life and the next.

Consider, for example, the temptation to make and/or acquire “bread” for ourselves – whether it be food, drink, or some other necessity. Such temptations lead us into all manner of sin and evil. For instance, it's certainly not a sin to work and earn a living – indeed, Scripture teaches that vocation is a gift from God, and that “he who will not work, should not eat.” But it *is* a sin to presume that in such working *we* are the ones who're providing for ourselves rather than realizing that our work, pay, daily bread, and all we have, comes to us entirely by grace.

Likewise it's a sin to neglect the other vocations God has given us – like husband, father, wife, mother or children – on the pretense that we need to “work” more and more to “earn” a living for ourselves and our family. Do you not see that all this is nothing more than works righteousness, and is not of faith? We're to do what God has given us to do because it's been given by God – not because, or as though, our life depended on it. Remember, our life depends solely on God – and not on those things He's given us to do as a vocation.

Our Lord Jesus clearly understood that, and so He lived His life accordingly – even to the point of death. Out there in desert when He was hungry He could've easily fed Himself, but He chose to live by faith – trusting the Word of His Father in the confidence that He would provide for His needs. He knew that the Father's love would be constant and certain *regardless of the circumstance*. Try placing yourself in that situation. Imagine forty days in the desert without food, praying all the while that God would deliver you. Imagine having to face the realization that God was nowhere to be found. Do you think it's possible you might begin believing that God has forgotten you, doesn't love you, or that maybe He's not really there at all? And what about the other alternative – where you have more than enough to eat and every earthly convenience. Might you not be tempted to conclude that God must be very pleased with you?

Neither conclusion, however, is valid, because neither the presence of food and money, nor the lack of it, is an accurate indicator of God's disposition. To gain that information, you have to rely on God's Word. The most dire predicament of your life might well be the hardship of a cross which comes from the hand of God – whereas wealth and riches could, in fact, be a snare and temptation from the devil. Whatever situation you find yourself in here in this world, you would do well to recall the warning of Jesus that we ought not to lay up for ourselves treasures on earth, but instead lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven – because, as Jesus reminds us, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

You and I, you see, we're often enticed by Satan to go for the easy fix instead of waiting quietly and patiently on God. But not Jesus. He put His confidence in God alone “to provide Him daily and richly with all He needed to support His body and life.”

He trusted the Father when the tempter came at Him repeatedly with his cunning, taunting mockery: “If You are the Son of God...” But even though He is the Son, He still had to learn obedience through suffering. Remember, He was doing it for us – in our place! In Godly fear therefore Christ didn't fight the temptation of Satan according to His own Divine power, but as our Brother, the perfect Second Adam who lived life as we were supposed live it – and who struggled against temptation the same way we should be struggling against it – by relying on the Father and clinging to His Word – even though hell was literally breaking loose all around Him.

The beloved Son would not bow down to Satan nor trade the ways of God for the comforts of the world, because He knew His only treasure was the Kingdom of His Father. His heart was set completely on the Father's will regardless of the cost. And in the strength of perfect faith, He renounced the devil – all his works and all his ways – even to the point of willingly receiving the cross and death we deserve. As the Perfect Man – and as our Savior from sin – Christ knew that that was where He must look for Life – and nowhere else.

Dear friends, in the Cross of our Savior is where God has granted us real life and real glory. There is no other place in this life or the next where a person can receive true comfort or happiness, for indeed, everything else will vanish like smoke when the day of trouble is upon us. There's no lasting glory in the kingdoms of this world – no forgiveness for our sins, no resurrection for our body, and no everlasting life – only empty promises and disappointment. Dear friends, here in the Church you are in the wilderness with our Savior. In the water of the Jordan poured out over you in Holy Baptism you also receive the sign of the Cross from the hand of our Father. In that water, God is daily drowning the old Adam in you even as He is raising up the New Man – who is Christ in you. There in that blessed Tide is where your repentance is met with God's forgiveness, your tears of sorrow are replaced with shouts of joy, and your Lenten grace will always end in Easter's Resurrection. May it always be so for Jesus' sake. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.