

J.j.

“Temptations and the Cross”

First Sunday in Lent, 5. March., A.D. 2017 ☩

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 59th & Broadway, Sacramento, CA

Mt. 4:1-11 1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” 4 But he answered, “**It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’**” 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” 7 Jesus said to him, “**Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’**” 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9 and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” 10 Jesus said to him, “**Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’**” 11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him. (NRSV)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father; to Whom be the glory forever and ever. [Gal.1:3-5]

As another Lent begins, we hear again the holy word of the very first temptation. Our ancestors, Adam & Eve, failed the test, and St. Paul, in Romans today interprets the meaning of that fall as the way by which sin entered our world. Then the Gospel puts before us a mighty struggle—go with me today into the desert where two figures struggle—the desert—mysterious—isolated—remote. They are struggling for a huge prize far from the big cities. The prize they struggle for?— the people of planet earth—you and me. The battle is between God's Son and Satan—a battle decided!—but the war goes on.

Question: How do we Lutheran Christians of St. Paul's do in that war today?

Question: Assuming we want to do better, how do we defeat temptation?

The answer begins in:

Part I, Temptations Surround Us.

I'm going to ask three simple questions of today's gospel: **1.where, 2.how and 3.why.**

First, Where was Jesus tempted?

Our text: “**Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.**”

Right after his Baptism in the Jordan River, Jesus was led where? into a **wilderness?**

What's a **wilderness?** And where was it?

The Greek root word means “abandoned.” And the first meaning in my Greek lexicon is actually ‘**desert,**’ not ‘wilderness,’—**desert** is the word most used in modern Bible translations.

Fascinating word, ‘desert;’ it comes from the Latin ‘*de-serere*’ where ‘*serere*’ means arrange or put in order, and ‘*de-*’ means the opposite—**disordered**—abandoned.

What's more, from that Indo-European root ‘SER’ come the words ‘series’, ‘insert’, ‘dissertation’, [I had to write one of those] and what else? ‘Ser-mon!’

So a **sermon** puts God's truth in order!

A desert is a deserted place where nothing is in order, the place is abandoned.

Precisely here is where Jesus is tempted—probably not very far east of the Jordan—a trackless waste—no green oasis to move toward, no animals, no traffic, nothing to look at with interest—a deserted desert. Why **there** was he tempted?

Temptations come not only from the world but from inside us where the Tempter lives. At his Baptism Jesus was ordained into ministry; now a few days later he is alone in the desert pondering his calling—and for **40 days!** No wonder he was hungry.

So What was the First Temptation?

3 And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”

Was hunger the temptation? Not the only one—it was a **hook** to get Jesus to bite on the **main** temptation which is: “**If you are the Son of God...**”

At his Baptism Jesus had heard the clear voice of his Father: “This is my beloved **Son.**” Now Satan says, ‘So you’re the Son of God? Well take care of yourself—no one else will!’ ‘Look, some of these rocks here look just like flatbread—show me what you can do.’

See how his faith in his Father was tested—he was tempted to give up on God.

In the same way **we** are tempted when we are alone against the world—and **hungry.**

We know the promises: God will provide—God will help us in our daily struggle for bread—he will not let us be tempted beyond our ability to endure.

But we are tempted to cut corners, to do shady deals, we covet what others have—it is a real temptation to give up on God, to forget that we are his baptized children.

Here’s how Jesus handled Satan: “**4 ... he answered, “It is written, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”**”

‘**It is written....**’ —Keep that in mind—we’ll come back to it.

Two: Where was the Second Temptation?

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, **6** saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

Aha! Satan is catching on—now he quotes Scripture; but did you know that Satan misquotes Scripture here? You can look it up in Ps. 91.

So Satan is truly a liar and the father of lies—we cannot defeat him alone.

Why were they up on that temple pinnacle anyway? And what was the temptation? Instant fame! You want to be Messiah—be a crowd pleaser! Jump down and miraculously survive before the temple crowd—that’s how you build your kingdom, Jesus. And the church today is tempted to give up on thousands of years of tradition based on the written Word of God in favor of entertainment and other attempts at success. What did Jesus say? v. 7 ...**it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’**

Three: Where was the Third Temptation

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; **9** and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

On a mountain top! There’s always something breath-taking about climbing a mountain—what if we could stand on Mt. Diablo and wish to own everything as far as we could see.

Well, maybe not that greedy—just unlimited cash—isn’t that what lures gamblers into the casinos?

Jesus was tempted to worship Satan, to give His loyalty to him rather than to God His Father.

Then all the kingdoms of the world would acknowledge Him and give Him the power and the glory.

But would they love him and follow him?

Once again He was tempted to give up on God his Father—to do things his way.

We are so often tempted to think that our personal power, either our personal

qualities like brains or charm; or our personal possessions -- home, cars, boats, bank accounts, stock portfolios--are what make us who we are rather than our confession of faith in Christ.

As a church we imitate too much the ways of the world instead of speaking to the world a word of challenge and warning.

As Jesus was tempted to disloyalty, so we are tempted to give up on God, and thus to worship some other supposed power or solution to gain success.

That's why, Part II, We Need to Trust the Cross

Have you been thinking about your own temptations? the ones hardest to resist? Would you like to hear mine? I mean my temptations as a pastor—presiding at Pulpit and Altar?

An old country parson was asked, 'What are the temptations of pastors?' He said, there are at least three—pastors are tempted to **shine**, to **whine**, or to **recline**.

I think he was right—the temptation to **shine** is the temptation to show off one's learning (BTW, did you hear any of that earlier in this sermon?).

After all, we attend seminary three years—**after** four years of college—plus a year of internship, and then post-grad work—we ought to show off what we learned, right? And aren't all of us tempted to be proud of what we know?

But do we use it, **not** to attract people into the church, but to draw attention to self, to pump up our image?

And what about **whining**? Isn't it easier to complain about something rather than to take steps to make things better?

And the temptation to **recline**? to take it easy? to avoid the hard work of producing a sermon, or whatever is our work in our various station in life?

So these are three good words to identify our daily temptations—and tempted we are.

Our Lord Jesus, quiet as is a lamb before its shearers, did not try to **shine**, to dazzle his enemies so as to escape—he **“endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”** (Heb. 12:2 ESV)

He did not **whine** and complain about the difficulty of his task—he did sweat blood as he prayed to his Heavenly Father in Gethsemane, knowing that a Roman cross, a terrible instrument of torture and death, was very near at hand.

He did not **recline**—he did not go off and hide from the hard work of our redemption—he took on the task of paying the debt of sin for all humankind.

Last Point, Let's Remember How He Defeated Satan. He said, **'It is written.'**

He trusted the written Biblical record, the written promise of God's love and grace.

He remembered reading how God again and again punished his ancient people Israel for going after false gods.

And he remembered reading how his Father rescued his people from their enemies.

He trusted the promise that he, too, would be rescued from his death on the cross.

And on the first Easter our Lord Jesus arose from the dead by the power of his Father.

Because he lives, we too shall live! Trust the cross!—today, put your faith in Christ!

Daily we are in the desert of this world and tempted, but **it is written**, **“Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”*** Jesus resisted, and **it is written**, (v. 11), **“Then the devil left him, and suddenly, angels came and were ministering to him.”**

Dear Lord God, let your holy angels **be with us**, that the wicked foe may have no power over us. Amen.