

Lent 1

“Jesus – the Destroyer of our greatest enemy – the devil” (Mark 1:12-13)

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 5th Sunday after Epiphany is from our Gospel reading, Mark 1:12-13.

“¹² Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. ¹³ And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him.”

So far the text...

40 days...in the wilderness...no comfort food...no after dinner drink or desserts... no “emotional support” pets for those who are having trouble dealing with tough world events...only wild animals...no food...no companions...texting...just total isolation...and one on one battle with the devil himself. That’s why the Holy Spirit led, or as our Gospel of Mark says, drove Jesus into the desert. Jesus had to do this battle alone. He had to destroy the power of the devil, the power of sin and death itself. How? By living the perfect holy sinless life and never, not once give into temptation.

Oh...Jesus felt temptation. We feel temptation all the time. That’s not a sin. But when one consents to temptation. That’s where the problem is. That’s where Adam and Eve messed up. How tasty looking was that fruit...and it would make you like God...knowing good and evil...and they fell. And so have we. We are born with original sin and we fail all the time to lead a sinless life.

Genesis 3:19

“In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.”

Our epistle reading from James explains our sinfulness with these words.

“14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”

In the Large Catechism, Luther explains the 6th petition “Lead us not into temptation” with these words.

For in the flesh we dwell and carry the old Adam about our neck, who exerts himself and incites us daily to in chastity, laziness, gluttony and drunkenness, avarice and deception, to defraud our neighbor and to overcharge him, and, in short, to all manner of evil lusts which cleave to us by nature, and to which we are incited by the society, example and what we hear and see of other people, which often wound and inflame even an innocent heart.

Sin destroys. It destroys relationships, families, marriages, one’s own life. And there would not be any hope at all, except that Jesus went into the desert for 40 days. Jesus didn’t fail where we have.

We began Lent on Wednesday as always with ashes on our forehead. It is a reminder that we have failed. Ashes are like putting a big “L” on your forehead. Loser. Lost to sin, lost to the devil, lost to death.

Pastor Goetz began our object lesson series with the object of 30 pieces of silver. The love of money which ruined Judas Iscariot. Money is a gift and is good. All things come from God, from above and He is the giver of all good gifts. But sin takes that good gift and instead of being content with what God gives, trusting with what God gives...our sinful flesh says “more”. I want more. I want what this person has and I’m willing to steal, lie, cheat and betray to get it. Because “stuff” is what life is all about.

Isn’t that what the devil tried to tempt Jesus to believe? Mark doesn’t give the details of some of the temptations but Matthew and Luke do. All the wealth, glory, fame of the world is yours if you bow down and worship me. And Judas did. He bowed to Satan and forsook God. How is our stewardship of the stuff that God gives us. Are we content? Are we willing to give our first fruits with a cheerful heart like Abel or begrudgingly give them like Cain?

Jesus didn't fall. **“Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” Luke 4:8**

It is written. It is written. Jesus didn't go into the desert defenseless. He went with a sword – the Word of God. He knew God's Word and was able to recite it and defend Himself with it. Jesus battled with the devil and destroyed him. Get behind Me. I lead – not you!

Jesus willingly went into the desert because this was the only way to victory for all of us sinners.

Hebrews 2:14-15

“14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

Destroy him...the one who has the power over us...the one who has the power to keep a sinner in bondage...until he is destroyed.

And that is what Jesus did. He lived the perfect life and then died so that we would be free from the fear of death, that we would be free from the bondage of Satan!

God planned for this rescue and even before God told Adam and Eve the consequence of sin death itself, God gave them and all of us the Good News, the first Gospel, the protoevangelium..

**“And I will put enmity Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel.”**

The Seed, Jesus Christ, will bruise Satan's head. Destroy Satan's head. “Get behind Me Satan” as Jesus went to the cross.” Jesus sinless life stands in our stead! Listen to how Hebrews 2 goes on to explain this.

17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make

propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”⁵⁵ “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And as we live with the victory...we pray and pray. “lead us not into temptation”. Luther puts it like this in the Large catechism:

“although we have received forgiveness and a good conscience and are entirely acquitted, yet is our life of such a nature that one stands to-day and to-morrow falls. Therefore, even though we be godly now and stand before God with a good conscience, we must pray again that He would not suffer us to relapse and yield to trials and temptations.”

This 6th petition is our cry to God for help! We will fall unless God would lead us by the power of His Word and Sacraments through the Holy Spirit!

1 Corinthians 10:12-13

“12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

Yes! God is faithful! He will help you always! Listen to what Jesus our great High Priest knows of us:

Hebrews 4:14-15

14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

God never tempts us to sin, but leads us out of temptation. He allows us to be tested so that we would turn to Him for help and strengthening of our faith. And Jesus gives us this day His very body and blood that were given and shed to destroy the devil. Luther says in the Large Catechism in the 6th petition.

“ Therefore we Christians must be armed and daily expect to be incessantly attacked, in order that no one may go on in security and heedlessly, as though the devil were far from us, but at all times expect and parry his blows. For though I am now chaste, patient, kind, and in firm faith, the devil will this very hour send such an arrow into my heart that I can scarcely stand. For he is an enemy that never desists nor becomes tired, so that when one temptation ceases, there always arise others and fresh ones.

Accordingly, there is no help or comfort except to run hither and to take hold of the Lord’s Prayer, and thus speak to God from the heart: Dear Father, Thou hast bidden me pray; let me not relapse because of temptations. Then you will see that they must desist, and finally acknowledge themselves conquered.”

Armed with the Word and Sacrament. We say “Satan get behind Jesus and get behind me, for I am united with Jesus in baptism...united in His death and resurrection. You have no power over me for you have no power over Jesus!

1 John 3:7-8

7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. 8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

And Jesus, the Son of God did. He destroyed the devil and all his works. So we walk in these 40 days in Jesus victory for Jesus rose from the dead. We walk all our lives following Jesus for He has removed the sting by His sinless life.

“12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” James 1:12

“And this peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)