

Sermon for the First Sunday in Lent March 9, 2025 jj

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Sin is not just a theological topic. It's your mortal enemy. Sin is always on the attack against you, an attack mounted by the father of lies, the devil himself. You were promised that your Lord Jesus Christ dwells in you ever since your baptism, but His protection from this attack seems weak at times. It's very distressing. No one is above sin and temptation, and our sinful nature is of course to blame for that, and we are descended from the first sinners, Adam and Eve - but that isn't much comfort. Wouldn't you rather be rid of sin for good? Isn't that why you came here today? You know there's sin in your life - and you don't like it one bit.

Yet the fact of the matter is that you're never going to be freed from sin's assaults until that day when God takes you to Himself. Daily you have to struggle with it. You struggle with it because you live in this fallen world. You struggle with it because the "Old Adam" who clings to you will never let go. And you struggle with it because the old evil foe will expend all his energy trying to trap and devour any who might try to escape his grip. Should it come as a surprise then, that when Jesus determined to take upon Himself the full weight of your sin, He found Himself face to face with the very same temptations you daily have to deal with?

When the prince of darkness confronted Jesus in the wilderness, right after His baptism, you might notice that he tempted our Lord with the very same unholy trinity of evil that you and I daily struggle with. Those three temptations try to cast doubt on your heavenly Father's ability to provide for your body, to value the praise and wealth of the world rather than God's love, and to place one's self over and above the Lord.

He was in the wilderness forty days without food, and so Satan tried to tempt Him first with

bread - and what is more, to get Jesus to obtain that bread in a most unholy way. How strong was this first temptation? Imagine how great the struggle would be for you if you hadn't eaten for forty days! Then add the full force of all the temptations arising from your old, sinful nature - the gluttony, the lust and the desire for all kinds of things that could easily bring you into harm's way. It's not only an unhealthy desire for food, but this temptation affects those who destroy themselves and their families by lust - who daily face the reality of addiction of any kind - and daily give in to it. These are the very same temptations of the body which our Lord Jesus Christ fully resisted when He stood fast against the devil's enticement that He feed Himself through a misuse of His own creative power. And when He refused to satisfy His hungry body in this way, that made His body become the righteous payment for all the sin you've ever committed with your body.

When it comes to the second temptation, you yearn for the pleasures you could enjoy if only you weren't a Christian - when you reach out to take something that God has not seen fit to give you - when you disregard the boundaries God has set about you - the authority He's set over you - and the dignity of the neighbor with whom you live and work - in all these ways Satan is busy tempting you. Satan came to Jesus with the false promise that if He would only yield to him, all the wealth of all the kingdoms of all the world would be His. Think how that temptation could have enticed His human nature - how wonderful the palaces of the world must have seemed, even to this Man who is God, after forty days in a barren wilderness, struggling to survive. Think how you struggle to improve your earthly life - to get a better job, a bigger house, a nicer car, anything pleasing or more secure - and then consider how Satan promised Jesus He could have far more than

that by taking the deceptive shortcut he offered Him. But Jesus willingly set aside His own desires, interests, and even His own gain, to the authority and will of His Father so that you might receive it all in His place.

You know well the struggles you daily face from the Devil, who comes to reinforce the temptation that's already in you by reason of your own sinful nature and this fallen world, who makes sure the thing you're most likely to fall for, that's exactly what's placed there before you. He takes perverse pleasure in causing the fall of those who seem highest and holiest - and that through the most sordid, cheap means at his disposal - because the seedier and cheaper the temptation that causes a person to fall, the harder it'll be for others to make God's voice heard in this world which already refuses to believe that there is a loving heavenly Father.

Every decent civic leader is besmirched by the person who would sell his vote or judgment for a few dollars - and soon all politicians and judges become derided as fools - in spite of the fact that God is the One who established them in their office for earthly peace and good order. Every honorable, hard-working businessman is hurt by the person who sells shoddy wares at inflated prices and preys on the gullibility of the public - even though God is the One who stations every person in their vocation to see that their neighbor is well-served. Every decent, loving, mother and father is hurt by those parents who abuse and neglect their own children - so that soon every mom and dad become the object of society's scorn - though in truth mothers and fathers have been called by God to serve in an office that's higher and holier than any other on earth. Even pastors are robbed of their voice and effect upon the hearts of people by that pastor or priest who falls into scandal - so that after a while, to many people, all pastors become suspect. Consider who it is that's able to plant such an evil image in your heart. Consider who it is who wants to destroy the blessed work of all good and helpful

vocations - and of every upright and honest leader, parent, teacher, or pastor.

Satan's the one who wants all authority, all offices, all vocations, and every avenue for Godly love, wisdom, and service to be degraded, scorned, ridiculed, and abandoned. Satan would like nothing better than if you would disregard everyone but yourself. He'd love you to overthrow your family, Church, society, and government in the false belief that you could then be in charge of it all by yourself. He'd like nothing better than to convince you that you can actually be like God. It's the breath of the Evil One which causes you to believe that ultimately you alone know what's best. It's a Satanic will which thinks it has the right to put itself before the needs of others. And this is what Jesus faced when He was taken to the pinnacle of the Temple and tempted to throw Himself down so that the angels of God could swoop down to catch Him. This is the temptation you face in your darkest hour - when destruction, rebellion, suicide, and all forms of lashing out against your self try to seep into your consciousness.

Make no mistake about it, dear children of God - it's in moments like this when you come face to face with the Evil One himself - and against such power, you, in your sin, on your own, are entirely helpless to defend yourself - no matter how strong you may think you are. The old Evil Foe does mean deadly woe. Deep guile and great might are his dread arms in fight. On earth is not his equal. And if you try to stand on your own in opposition to such might and power, soon you'll find yourself defeated.

Yet, sadly, that's exactly what oftentimes happens. You try to stand on your own - and soon you find yourself caving in - helpless, hopeless, and powerless before the might of the devil's temptation which attacks through our flesh, our world, and our own evil lusts and desires. But know this for certain, Jesus has already - once and for all - stood where you

yourself have often fallen! He was tempted, just as you are daily - and yet, He fully and completely overcame your mortal enemy. And, even though you may think and act as if you're all alone in this world and struggle, the Good News is the exact opposite!

though these all be gone, our victory has been won. The kingdom ours remaineth."

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Valiant One, whom God himself elected, is there with you - fighting alongside of you - fighting for you. This Jesus Christ, the Lord of hosts - this One who carries within Himself the very power and might of heaven - this One who alone is God - alongside whom there is no other God - who was tempted by Satan in every possible way - this is the One who overcame it all for you - as Satan lost, and Jesus won. And now, because Jesus has won, you've been freely given His life and victory forever to claim as your own. Daily He gives you the prize of forgiveness from your own defeat under sin and temptation. Even in the midst of all this He has made you the victor. The kingdom of God is near as Jesus calls you again to repent and believe the Good News - to come to Him with your sin so that you might leave this place today with His righteousness - and as He gives you opportunity, to eat His body and drink His blood for the forgiveness of your sins!

Once, you were alone and without hope - helpless before the threefold enemies of your old sinful nature, this fallen world, and the devil. But now, with all the hosts of God's kingdom, you too are able to sing with joy the words Martin Luther sang so long ago in celebration of the awareness God had given him concerning the blessed victory of the Savior for us all: "Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill, they shall not overpower us. This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will. He can harm us none, he's judged; the deed is done; one little word can fell him. The Word they (our enemies) still shall let remain, nor any thanks have for it. He's by our side upon the plain (of our battle) with His good gifts and Spirit. And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife,