

Sermon for the First Sunday in Lent February 22, 2026 jj

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Be sober, be vigilant, we hear from the Apostle Peter. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in your faith. But what does this roaring lion want from you? What is it about you that sets the evil one's sights dead center in your direction? There wasn't anything you did directly to offend Satan so. What makes the old evil foe so hell-bent on your destruction?

I'll tell you what it is. It's your baptism. He can't stand it. It may have looked like ordinary water that was poured over you and some few words spoken at the same time, but to the devil, it was absolutely sickening, like glass shards churning in his stomach. Your baptism ties him up like a strong man tied to a chair by an even stronger man, who then proceeds to rob his house of all his ill-gotten gains- that is to say, your baptism into Christ stole you away from Satan. He wants to rob you of your baptism, and the comfort of everlasting life that it gives you, yet it's a theft that he will never be able to pull off. No one in any height, nor depth will be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ your Savior, the love of God that was granted you in your baptism.

So the ancient serpent, prowling lion, accuser, adversary, father of lies, all of the above, he wants you to give up your baptism voluntarily. He chooses to question your baptism instead. It's the very same tactic that he began with Jesus while our Lord was spending His 40 days of fasting in the wilderness. Jesus, true God and true man, was really feeling the side effects of His frail

humanity. His body was beginning to lack the strength that must be revived with food. Jesus was fully aware that His Father would never forsake Him, yet His physical hunger made these temptations terribly real, even for the perfect Son of God. He had not one ounce of self-serving evil ambition in Him, but He still had to choose to follow His Father's will, despite what the tempter put in front of Him.

He wanted Jesus to question His own baptism! If you look back to Matthew chapter 3, that ended with the account of John baptizing Jesus in the Jordan River. Immediately after He was washed with the water, and the dove, the Spirit of God, descended and landed on Him, then God the Father spoke out from an open heaven, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. That was Jesus' own baptism, and the devil couldn't stand it. If he had any chance to survive in his evil ways, he had to dismantle this essential cornerstone of our Lord's saving ministry. When the Son of God, born of the virgin Mary, willingly took the place of all the world's sinners in the very water in which those sinners were forgiven of their sins, the kingdom that Satan desired started to crumble through his evil fingers. And just like he did while as the Serpent he spoke to Eve in the Garden of Eden, he had to question the love and generosity of the Father. Instead of Did God really say you must not eat fruit from any tree at all? This time, he posited, If you are the Son of God, give the Divine command to make these stones into bread. Jesus, he was saying, you should doubt that the Father is pleased with you, that you are indeed His only begotten Son. After all, here You are in

the desert, hungry and lonely. He's in heaven, sending You to undertake the salvation of the world. Prove Your Sonship, Your God head, prove it to yourself and to me! Prove that your baptism means for You that You have the Father's full pleasure. Show me that God isn't holding something back and keeping it from You!

When the devil tempts you, he knows that he cannot remove the gift of your baptism, but even if he could succeed in convincing you to give it up yourself, there would have to be something else that takes its place, or else his treachery would be exposed, and you would flee his evil grasp. Again, the same playbook as Genesis 3- use one of God's good gifts to serve yourself and set yourself as equal to or above God. Instead of your baptism, which is a guarantee of your heavenly Father's mercy toward you, of His acceptance of you into His kingdom, free of any guilt or stain, instead of that, the evil one wants you to insist on justice, fairness, being equal. But this is a new definition of justice-one that centers on yourself, a justice very much in vogue in today's world. It insists upon treating you fairly, justly, and that defies anyone who questions you or denies you whatever you desire, including God Himself. How dare the Church, those religious zealots, speak for God and say my lifestyle is sinful! How hateful the Bible is to tell me I deserve to die and be condemned to hell for what I can only see as beautiful in my eyes. It's not fair! I should depend upon God to sustain my health, keep my loved ones alive and free from suffering, prevent disasters from happening, in short, whatever I want, God must give me, or I shouldn't trust that He's a good God for me. Turn these stones into bread. Throw yourself down from the temple roof. Serve another god and get whatever you want. Insist on

what's right, and what's fair, because no one else will fight for you, but you.

Brothers and sisters, there is a way to withstand this assault of Satan upon your baptism. But the lesson here isn't, be like Jesus and learn all the right Bible passages to say whenever you're tempted. That's not the point of this Gospel account that's reserved for the first Sunday in Lent. Do more, is not going to win your spiritual battles with the roaring lion that's seeking to devour you. Instead, you must hold on to your baptism. And not just because that's the prize he's after. Trust that in your baptism, God your Father also claimed you as His beloved. There He said that He is well-pleased with you, because He is well pleased with Jesus standing in for you.

Jesus shows us with His battle of temptation in the wilderness that His baptismal promise to be Savior for you is not an empty promise. He pointedly, deliberately enters your fray, and immerses Himself in whatever is your misery that you suffer. He put on your flesh, He fought your battle against the devil and sin. And He proves that He can and has overcome not just some evil forces in a fascinating story about the past, but He has conquered the very devil that taunts and haunts you to this very day. He won your victory.

What you have heard today, then, is the beginning of your salvation story. For until now in the Church Year, the theme since Christmas has all been promise and expectation, pledge and hope. But when the Spirit that came to Jesus at His baptism shoves Him out into the wilderness, when the Father inserts His Son into the middle of the devil's playing field, plopped him down into Satan's video game, when the Lord

makes Himself vulnerable to demonic and diabolic tricks--then He begins to come through on His promise; then hope becomes real; and then the Word and baptism pledge for your forgiveness and everlasting life comes true and enters into your life.

Yet you still may be tempted to hear this story as history—a true event, of course, but it took place long ago and it has meaning today only because it changed the course of events way back then. But the Lord's mercy is not mere history. And His ways are not simply past events to set the world straight, or just evidence to prove that He can do it.

When Our Lord enters the wilderness to battle Satan, you must see that the Lord is entering your own wilderness. Not just some deserted place in Judea, but also the desolation of your own heart and mind—all that hurts you, all that you have used to afflict others, that is what the Lord enters, makes His own, He feels it for real and He suffers. As the Psalms continually pray, the Lord plants Himself squarely in our muck, our slimy pit, our mire and the filth we have made. He sits in the dust and ashes with us. He descends to the lowest part of our personal hell. He wraps Himself in the things that trouble us so deeply that we cannot find the words to confess or explain them. That is our wilderness. And there is Our Lord, in the midst of it, sober and vigilant as ever, fighting our lions and shutting their mouths like He did for Daniel in the lion's den.

That is how you should hear today's Gospel. For it is not just another religious story or lesson. It is the Lord sending His Son to have mercy on you. It is the Lord's Word and sure mercies overcoming your greatest fears. It is the Lord placing Himself squarely

between you and the things that threaten to undo you. It is Jesus giving you more than what justice and fairness can ever give you—you have His strength where you have no strength. It is the Lord enduring and persevering even though your hopes may fade and your faith sometimes wavers.

And if that is not enough when you are really suffering a trial, remember that there are also the holy angels who minister not only to Jesus, but He sends them also to serve you. They're part of your baptism package too. Sing praise now with those angels who are here with you, giving thanks to God the Father, who gave you Christ your Savior, and who guides and sustains you through the Holy Spirit. 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 armies of God's kingdom and your dearly loved ones who have taken their place in the company of heaven, you too are able to sing with joy the words Martin Luther penned so long ago in celebration of the blessed victory of the Savior for us all: "And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, though these all be gone, our victory has (still) been won. The kingdom ours remaineth."

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