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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Lent 1, Series C
Saturday, March 5th, 2022
Sunday, March 6th, 2022

Sermon: Temptation Redux

Texts: Luke 4:1-13

Focus: Jesus Christ, the God-man, overcame every temptation *for us*.

Function: That they rejoice in Jesus' victory over temptation for their salvation.

Structure: Story-Interrupted

Locus: "God tempts no one. We pray in this [sixth] petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory" (SC, 6th Petition of Lord's Prayer).

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen. Every year on the first Sunday in Lent, for our Gospel lesson we turn to the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, whether it be Matthew, Mark, or Luke. And each time we revisit this event in the life of our Lord, we return to our own temptation as well.

And so it begins. Jesus' temptation followed *immediately* upon his Baptism (cp. Mark 1:12). He'd barely caught his breath after coming out of the water, when the Holy Spirit brought him to the time and place of his testing.

Jesus fasted and was tempted by the devil for forty days in the wilderness. And, the Bible tells us, “he was hungry” (Luke 4:1b, ESV).¹ Jesus was hungry. That is, perhaps, one of the greatest understatements in the entire Bible. Of *course*, he was hungry! By the end of those 40 days, Jesus was whittled down to just skin and bones.

Ordinary Jewish fasts lasted only from sunrise to sundown. Yet once it became dark, you were permitted to eat. Not so with Jesus’ fast. He fasted for forty days *and forty nights* (Matt. 4:2). That’s 960 hours straight without a single bite to eat. Back when I was a teenager in youth group, I could barely make it through the World Vision “Thirty Hour Famine” fundraiser to help end world hunger. Yes, after 40 days, Jesus certainly would be hungry.

So it was that when Jesus was in a weakened and vulnerable state—nearly famished—the devil first came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread” (Luke 4:3). That first phrase, “If you *are* the Son of God” is an attack against Jesus’

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

identity. Remember: the temptation comes right after his Baptism, when the heavenly Father's voice declared, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (3:22). Jesus' baptism revealed his identity. The temptations would test it. In fact, two of the three temptations begin with doubt, "If you *are* the Son of God..."

So does the last temptation of Jesus. For when he hanged on the cross, bleeding out and gasping for air, then the devil's very words came from the forked tongues of the Jewish priests and other passersby: "If you *are* the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matt. 27:40). In other words, if you are really are the Son of God, then prove it! Give us a show. Come down from the cross, and then we will believe in you.

Yet it is precisely *because* Jesus is the Son of God that he *remained* on the cross. Jesus didn't stay on the cross because he couldn't free himself. He stayed on the cross to free *us* from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Nails didn't keep him on the cross. Love did.

As with the last temptation of Christ, the essential nature of the first temptation was for Jesus to save himself instead of us, to use his

divine power for his own benefit instead of for our salvation. From our viewpoint, what could be wrong about Jesus feeding himself? Yet to cave into the hunger and to work a miracle for his own benefit would deprive the act of moral significance and reduce it to mere magic—the perennial temptation of those who take too lightly the holy things of God.

Jesus had to say no to his own satisfaction in order to make satisfaction for our sin. He had to overcome the idolatry and distrust of Israel, which constantly doubted God’s ability to provide in the wilderness. Instead, Jesus trusted in God to sustain him. For, after all, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” (Luke 4:4).

Notice how Jesus defeated the devil by quoting Scripture. And to be more precise, he quoted from Deuteronomy, a book of the Bible many Christians are inclined to overlook or skip over in their Bible reading plan. Yet all three Bible passages quoted by Jesus in his temptation were from Deuteronomy, indicating the truth that “*all* Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching...” (2 Tim. 3:16). In other words, the book of Deuteronomy (or Numbers or

Philemon) is just as divinely inspired as John 3:16—or any other section of Scripture). As such, God wants us to “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” the entire Bible. Otherwise, if you do not memorize Scripture, how will you be able to stand against the devil in your own trials? “I have stored up your Word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11).

In the second temptation, Satan tempts Jesus to take a shortcut to world domination. “And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time” (Luke 4:5). Satan promises that if Jesus will simply bow down to worship him, then he would hand over to him the power and the glory of all the kingdoms of the world—“for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will” (Luke 4:6).

Imagine what might have happened if Jesus were to take up Satan on this bargain and bow down before him. If Satan were sincere—which I highly doubt—then Jesus would immediately have command and control over every country and kingdom upon the earth. He would be the Lord of everyone and everything. But he would not be our

Savior. For if he were not victorious in that temptation, then he would have no real share in our flesh and, thereby, could not be our substitute on the cross. To seize power without suffering would make him “a Satanic Messiah,” but not our Savior.² For the Christ, there can be no kingdom or crown without the cross.

And that’s only if the devil kept up his end of the deal. But Satan is a liar and a cheat. He is the father of lies and has been a liar from the beginning (John 8:44). Satan is much like the evil sorcerer named Sauron in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. Sauron tempted the wizard Saruman with promises of power and his own domain. The Dark Lord successfully bribed Saruman to betray his friends. But Sauron had no intention of giving Saruman anything. Saruman was a puppet, a plaything, a useful tool to harry his enemies, the free folk of Middle-earth. But if Sauron had won the War of the Ring, Saruman would have had a rather rude awakening. For, as Gandalf warned him, “There is

² Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 212.

only one Lord of the Ring—and he does not share power!” Neither does Satan.

Nor was that power and authority truly his to give in the first place. While it is true that the devil is called the “prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2), he is a usurper. Heaven is *God’s* throne, and the earth is his footstool (Isa. 66:1). The famous line Milton put in Lucifer’s mouth is that it is “better to reign in hell than serve in heaven” (*Paradise Lost*). Yet in reality, the devil doesn’t rule or reign anywhere, not even in hell—especially not anymore. For, as Jesus declared on Palm Sunday: “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out” (John 12:31). And in another place, he says, “Behold, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). The devil is *not* in charge. He has nothing to offer, nothing to give. All he speaks are *lies*!

So Jesus rebukes the devil with the simple truth of Scripture: “You shall worship the LORD your God, and him only shall you serve” (Luke 4:8). It’s a reminder of the First Commandment—“no other gods” (Ex. 20:3)—and another quotation from Deuteronomy. Instead of taking shortcuts and buying into the devil’s deceits, Jesus chooses the way of

suffering and the cross. He chooses death, so that we might live. He will be crowned with a crown of thorns and given a reed for his staff instead of a golden scepter. Not until the Last Day will he rule with a rod of iron (cf. Ps. 2:9; Rev. 19:5).

In our third temptation scene, the devil takes Jesus to Jerusalem and stands him on the roof of the Temple. “If you *are* the Son of God,” he says—there it is again!—“throw yourself down from here, for it is written, ‘He will command the angels concerning you, to guard you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone’” (Luke 4:9-11).

Satan has learned something from his two earlier encounters with Christ. Jesus wields the Word of God as his weapon against the crafts and assaults of the devil. But Satan can quote Scripture too! He quotes a comforting passage from Psalm 91 and dares Jesus to jump off the roof of the Temple to see if God’s promises are true—and to amaze the spectators down below. Quite notably, Alfred Edersheim—an Austrian Jew who converted to Christianity and became an Anglican priest—reports that the Jewish rabbis in fact *expected* that the Messiah would

proclaim and announce himself to Israel from the roof of the Temple.³

Had Jesus done what the Jews expected—and what Satan demanded—then at once Jesus would have been received as Israel’s Messiah.

“Thus,” writes Edersheim, “the Messiah of Judaism is the Anti-Christ of the Gospels.”⁴

Yes, Satan can quote and misquote Scripture too. He is a wily and worldly wise enemy. Just as crooked politicians can twist the Bible and take it out of context in order to fake a fair appearance, so also the devil can misquote Scripture. The Bible says that he can even “masquerade as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). So if you do not know God’s Word, how will you recognize the attacks of the evil one? How will you prepare yourself from temptation if you do not know what the Bible says? The devil reads *his* Bible. You had better read yours too!

One Bible verse out of context can easily be misused and misapplied. But Jesus is ready for this attack, and he repels the assault brilliantly. He applies the classic Christian principle of Biblical

³ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 204.

⁴ Edersheim, 204.

hermeneutics: Scripture interprets Scripture. If you do not understand one passage of Scripture, then ask the Holy Spirit to show you another passage that enlightens it. And so Jesus pulls another arrow out of his quiver from Deuteronomy and retorts, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test” (Luke 4:12).

Last week a pastor friend of mine (David Solum) pointed out that, in his quotation of Psalm 91, Satan conveniently leaves out the very next verse: “You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot” (Ps. 91:13). Did you catch that?! God’s people will trample the *serpent* underfoot. And not just any old snake slithering through the grass, but the original, cunning serpent himself, also known as Satan, the devil, and the dragon. In fact, in the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament), the word for “serpent” is rendered with the Greek word *drakon*, which means “dragon” and is used as one of Satan’s aliases in the Apocalypse (cf. Rev. 12:3ff; 20:1-2).

Jesus’ defeat of the devil during his temptation is a partial fulfillment of God’s promise in Genesis 3:15: “The LORD God said to

the serpent..., ‘I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel’” (Gen. 3:14a, 15). Did you catch that? The woman’s offspring—a male descendent of Eve—would crush the head of the serpent. Yes, the serpent would bruise his heel—and it would hurt a lot. But one day one particular male descendant—a “dude”—would defeat the devil once and for all by dealing him a crushing blow. For a foot wound may hurt terribly, but a head wound is fatal. And who’s the man who would trample the serpent underfoot? None other than Jesus Christ, our Lord. “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). And that’s what Jesus did when he overcame the devil’s temptations in the wilderness—and on the cross.

The devil lost the battle in the wilderness, but he wasn’t ready to admit defeat in the war. He made a tactical retreat and waited for another day. “When the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13). The devil ended *every* temptation. In other words, even though the three most prominent

temptations are the ones recorded in the Gospels, Jesus suffered a great many more temptations of the devil. In fact, the author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus “in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Jesus has been tempted in every way imaginable—just like you and me!—but did not sin. As the old saying goes, “He’s been there...” He just hasn’t “done that.”

Jesus knows what it’s like to walk in our shoes. He knows what it’s like to suffer while being tempted. And because of that, he’s able to sympathize with us and give us grace in the moments of our testing—and our defeats. And that is why we can boldly approach his throne of grace to find help in our time of need.

After all the temptations, the devil left him. He went away from Jesus. But like the Terminator, he vowed, “I’ll be back.” The devil would wait for “an opportune time” (Greek: *kairos*), a time and place in which to kick Jesus while he was already down on his knees: the Garden of Gethsemane. Yet even then Jesus would foil the tempter. For it is down on his knees, praying to the Father, that he found his ultimate strength.

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And that is why Jesus teaches us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:13). Our Lord gives us his prayer to pray so that the devil may not win the day. Here’s Bonhoeffer: “Because Christ was tempted and overcame, we can pray: Lead us not into temptation. For the temptation has already come and been conquered. He did it in our stead.”⁵ Because Jesus overcame every temptation, died for our sins, and rose again to give us eternal life, the devil cannot win. Even when we falter and cave into temptation, we still overcome by the cross of Christ, because ever since Jesus’ death and resurrection, “all temptation is temptation of Jesus Christ and all victory is victory of Jesus Christ.”⁶ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.

⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Temptation*, 122.

⁶ Bonhoeffer, 143.