

First Sunday of Lent

March 9, 2025

St. Luke 4:1-10:

TEMPTATIONS

- I. Understanding
- II. Temptations
- III. To Take Our Place

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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St. Luke 4:1-10

Dear Friends in Christ,

Every time I read The Temptation of Jesus I recall an incident from about 44 years ago which I think I've mentioned in the past. A woman sat in my office and told me that she belonged to a Satanic worship group. She wouldn't give me her name and stated that she had witnessed a human sacrifice. She was very nervous and afraid that someone might be following her. As we talked, I received a phone call that I was expecting. The caller was requesting a specific piece of information. I excused myself to the woman so I could briefly look through a desk file. I looked down for about 10 seconds. When I looked up the woman was gone. I didn't hear her. I looked outside and around the church. She was gone.

Jesus said to those who wanted to destroy Him: "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies (Jn.8:44)." The woman could have said the same thing as a result of what she witnessed in Satanic worship. The only things Satan can do are murder and lie.

I can't cite the author, but here's the insight: "The devil's greatest asset is the doubt people have about his existence." Experience tells me that the worst thing a child of God can do is ignore the reality. Our theme for these Sundays of Lent is "Drawn To The Cross." Our journey begins with . . .

TEMPTATIONS

I. Understanding

Do we understand how Satan leads a soul to hell? It's spelled out in these words of Scripture: "...Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor.11:14). Remember what he said to Eve?: "...Did God actually say...(Gen.3:1b)?" Well, if a person steps outside the clarity of God's Word and lets their desires think about that...well...then what?

And this: "You will not surely die (Gen.3:4)." How sweet! The "angel" shines his "light." How comforting. But have we ever considered how many cemeteries there are in this city and county, alone? What a liar and murderer! There's an old saying that states, "When we resist temptation, it is usually because the temptation is weak, not because we are strong." And Ogden Nash, a noted American poet, wrote, "I can resist anything except temptation." Does that sound familiar? He then stated, "The only way to get rid of temptation is to give in to it." I'm thinking, Satan loves that statement.

Christian writer Theodore W. Schroeder wrote: "...the temptations (of Christ) are ours. We delude ourselves and empower Satan if we make him into a costumed prankster bent on getting us to do wrong. Doing wrong comes easy to us - we need no help there. Satan is interested in what we think, what we believe about ourselves and God." Dear friends, it's the Scriptures that warn us, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall (1 Cor.10:12)." So, let's take a look . . .

II. The Temptations

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread (vv.1-3)."

Satan is sly, unless you carefully listen to and weigh what he's saying. "If you are the Son of God..." is spoken to Him who hadn't eaten for 40 days! The "If you are..." is sort of like saying, "Did God actually say?" It's a challenge and with that is Satan's whisper, "Oh, that's a 'little' sin. It's okay." You know, he really is a snake!

We must hear Jesus' response: "And Jesus answered him, 'It is written "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Lk.4:4 and Mt.4:4)."' When tempted the question is, do we really know what's written in God's Word? Well, Eve heard the Word from the mouth of God. And look: "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took its fruit and ate...(Gn.3.6)." And remember? "...and she gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate (v.6b)." - the man who stood face to face with God and heard His Word! The flesh ruled over the Word. And we know the outcome: death; physical and eternal.

And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will be all yours (vv.5-7)."

And there it is: all the glitter of the world. And Satan flashes it in front of a person's face on a platter of deceit and eternal treachery. "Run after it - lust for it - - fill your flesh!" Who needs God when you can have your heaven here?" - so says the murderer and father of lies.

I recalled reading many years ago an article in an archeological journal about the discovery of a woman's petrified body in the ruins of Pompeii. She was found holding in her hands all of her precious jewelry. Instead of fleeing utter doom she lost everything. Yes, Satan will give you everything... everything...a lie with a price attached to it: Screaming in hell! A man named Guthrie wrote:

This world often seems like a rock at sea on which, eager to escape the jaws of death, more drowning people seek standing room than it offers. And when the few who have risen on the shoulders of the many who sink have gained for themselves the wealth or power or pleasure they desire, they have only reached an unsheltered, slippery rock, from which the giant wave of death presently sweeps them to their doom."

And Jesus gives the remedy for this: "It is written, "You shall worship the Lord your "God, and him only will you serve (v.8)." Our text goes on to report:

And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on a pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone (vv.9-11)."

Satan knows Scripture, and can twist and turn it into deception and destruction. Remember Satan's reply to Eve? "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil (Gn.3:4-5)." Satan speaks half truths to deceive and delude. Indeed, Adam and Eve didn't die...right away. Indeed, Adam's and Eve's eyes were opened and they would be like God, knowing good and evil. Unfortunately, their opened eyes revealed their nakedness, sin, shame, dying and death.

III. To Take Our Place

Temptations. They're a constant in a fallen world and in our lives. And so, Jesus was led into the wilderness, then taken to a high place, and finally the pinnacle of the temple to intervene for us and was tempted beyond our comprehension. Please listen to these words from the Book of Hebrews:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery (and that would take us into hell). For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham (that would be us, offspring through faith in Christ). Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect (yet, without sin), so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sin of

the people (propitiate means to satisfy the wrath of God because of our sin against Him). For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Heb.2:14-18).

Jesus willingly, out of love for us, traveled this journey with Satan to take our place. He would pay the price for all the innumerable falls into sin we've taken because of our temptations. Jesus becomes our binding and permanent cover who shelters us from the wrath of God and eternal condemnation because of all our and the ones still there. Paul writes:

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification (making one "not guilty") and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience (Adam's) the many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience (Jesus) the many will be made righteous (Rm.5:18-19).

But remember, the confrontation with Satan is not over. We're told, "And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time (v.13)." The "time" would draw us to the Cross, the spilling of Divine Blood to cleanse away our sin and grant us eternal peace. Somebody said, "Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of God no matter the conflict." That applies to this world. In Heaven peace is without end. The Cross points the way.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott