

February 18, 2018
First Sunday in Lent

St. Matthew 4:1-11

**“The Journey That Much Be Made:
Into the Wilderness”**

Pilgrim Lutheran Church, 2155 N Oakland Ave. Decatur IL 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Sin was brought into the world by the devil (who was once a holy angel but fell away from God) and by man, who of his own free will yielded to the temptation of the devil. 1 John 3:8 says, "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." Paul writes, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned . . . (Rom. 5:12)." What Paul is talking about here is what we call original sin. Original sin is the total corruption of our whole human nature. In the words of David, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me (Psalm 51:5)." From original sin, we commit every act against the commandments of God in thought, word, and deed as Jesus states: "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies (Matthew 15:19)."

In the beginning, mankind was made in the image of God. When mankind fell into sin, all became inwardly like Satan himself, bearing his likeness in the heart; both having rebelled against the majesty in Heaven. In Genesis 3:15 we are confronted with the reality that all of mankind, apart from Christ, is the seed (progeny/offspring) of the serpent. We are full of self-love, self-will, and the unceasing ambition to put ourselves in the place of God. We are inclined and capable of every diabolical wickedness imaginable, and whatever we may do that appears to be right, is in fact counted evil by God on account of what is on the inside. As Paul writes, "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin (Romans 14:23)." Without Christ, none is righteous, no not one (Romans 3:10b-11).

If we were to stop here, what a terrible sermon that would be! If this would be the sole aim of preaching, then it would seem to be better to stay home in bed. But, Paul writes (Romans 3:21-25) these beautiful words:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it - the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

By faith in the righteousness of God (who is Jesus Christ), we have been declared righteous. Through the redemption that is in Christ our Savior, we have been purchased from sin, death, and the power of the devil. The devil no longer owns us. By the propitiation of Jesus' blood, all of our sins have been covered, forgiven in his name. The Holy Spirit has given us saving knowledge of Jesus so that we trust and believe, rejoice and take comfort in him. By faith, the Holy Spirit works a renewal in our whole life - in our being, so that we now sincerely strive to overcome sin and do good works. As it says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." We have been raised unto a new life in Jesus.

And yet, even though we are new creation (the offspring of Christ), and by him the image of God is being restored in us, we also recognize that as long as we are in this world, we carry around with us our

sinful natures. Though our sin has died in Christ, we still carry around with us a body of death that would somehow putrefy the life of Christ in us. Original sin (the seed of the serpent) is always trying to rise up and destroy the new creation in us. The devil, the world, and our sinful nature try to mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great sins so that we end up being the offspring of Satan - his possession. We see this paradox in Simon Peter. In verse 16 of Matthew chapter 16, Peter is confessing Christ. In verse 22 of the same chapter, we read about Peter working to convince Jesus to avoid his death in Jerusalem. Jesus pointedly says to Peter: "Out of my sight, Satan, you are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men (Matthew 16:23)."

It was not that Satan had literally possessed Peter. He did not enter inside of him. Jesus was referring to the seed of the serpent that is even found in all Christian people. That seed of the serpent can pop up at any time so that we find ourselves thinking, saying, and doing things that are equivalent to the identity of Satan himself. Most disturbing isn't it? Satan has an ally in our sinful natures - a seed in his image (in us). It is on this ground that Satan and all spiritual enemies attempt to lure us away from God. It is no wonder as to why Jesus says, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Mark 14:38)." And let us not fool ourselves into thinking that our regeneration in Jesus Christ is some sort of a guarantee that living the Christian life and overcoming temptation is going to be easy. The Scriptures say to the Christian: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man (1 Cor. 10:13a)." However, we would do well to listen to the rest of the verse, as it does go on to say: "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it (1 Cor. 10:13b)."

We endure and overcome it only through Jesus. He is the way of escape. In the Garden of Eden, mankind failed miserably. On account of the fall into sin, we find ourselves conceived and born as a part of a loveless world. We find ourselves occupied with ourselves and not the things of God. This is why the temptation of Jesus Christ is such an incredible thing to behold. When we look at Jesus, we see perfect love. "Love is the fulfillment of the law," as it says in Romans 13:10. Jesus does everything right for us, and furthermore endures the punishment for our lawlessness. In Christ, we see true self-sacrifice and the complete overcoming of original sin. He is reversing what took place in the Garden of Eden, and what we must face every day. Christ is doing exactly what should have been done right from the very beginning. I really appreciate the way in which Ambrose expressed it (A.D. 340?-397). In his *Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*, he wrote:

It is fitting that it be recorded that the first Adam was cast out of Paradise into the desert, that you may observe how the second Adam [Jesus] returned from the desert to Paradise . . . Adam brought death through the tree, Christ brought life through the cross . . . So Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, is led into the desert for a purpose, in order to challenge the devil. If he had not fought, he would not have conquered him for me.

And with that, we are brought to our theme for this First Sunday in Lent: **The Journey That Must Be Made: Into the Wilderness.** Indeed! Jesus - **Into the Wilderness** in order that we might be brought back *Into the Garden!* And having been brought back into the Garden by faith in Jesus and all that he has

done, we are bid to face the serpent with Jesus every day, even so that the serpent's seed in us might die and the seed of Christ might live in us daily.

Whenever we think of Satan, we need to remember that Jesus conquered him. In other words, it would be unwise to over emphasize his power or underestimate his rage. Christ overcame him in the wilderness, throughout his entire life, and especially on the cross where he died for our sins that we might be forgiven and live in paradise. Therefore, our final destination is not one of sin and death. Every time Jesus and the devil clashed - every single time - Jesus was successful. The Bible not only says that Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are, but it also says that he remained without sin. And the beautiful thing is that he was successfully fighting Satan for us, so that he could trade his perfect record for our miserable one. He overcomes in order that we might overcome.

Every time you and I have set our trust in God's promises off to the side, Jesus held onto God's promises without wavering. Every time you and I listened to Satan and excused our falls into sin, Jesus cut through the devil's lies and held onto the truth. Every time you and I have failed and taken the easy way out, Jesus stayed the course; all the way to the cross, to render the final crushing blow to Satan - so that our sins could be completely forgiven - so that our every fall into temptation could be erased - so that Satan could never again successfully accuse us before God - that we might reach our destination.

Believing that Jesus has done this for us, we now stand in him. Even though we are tempted by the devil to throw our future away for a moment, Jesus teaches us to believe that we have a future life that is true love. And as we fix our eyes on him and all that he gives, he clearly teaches us how to overcome. We overcome by knowing and holding onto truth when confronted with lies. As we rejoice in knowing that Satan was unable to undermine Christ's determination to be our Redeemer, we do not allow Satan to undermine our desire to be the bride of Jesus. To that end, our Savior shows us how to defeat Satan. We defeat him by knowing and believing God's Word. James writes: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:7)." This is **The Journey That Must Be Made: Into The Wilderness** with Jesus. But, as he went into the wilderness, and bids us to even follow him there, so shall we be with him in paradise!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott