



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
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February 21, 2010
1st Sunday in Lent
Luke 4:1-13
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Joshua 7:16-26
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 3
Second Lesson: Hebrews 4:14-16
Gospel: Luke 4:1-13

Recognize Temptations' Twists

Have you heard enough of Tiger Woods' statement yet, or would you like to see it about 13 or 14 more times? I didn't see it live, but it doesn't mean I haven't heard it over and over. I've probably seen it a couple of times since then and heard news clips. I've heard people dissecting it, tearing it apart, talking about it and going on and on about it. But I think the one thing that really caught my attention was that in talking about what he had done wrong, he said "I've worked hard and I felt I was entitled to do some of these things. And the temptations, since I am rich and powerful so to speak, were always right there and you didn't have to go far to get into the temptations."

Think about that; how often we get into temptation because of a sense of entitlement. You and I might not think we are like professional athletes who feel they are entitled to have everything handed to them so they don't have to do their homework or do this or do that, but haven't you and I ever sat down and said, "You know what? I've worked hard. I'm tired. I deserve this. I deserve that." And sometimes we say it to things that God has said "No, you shouldn't be doing that." "I deserve to be happy. My spouse isn't making me happy, so I'm going to have an affair." "I've had a tough day, so I'm not just going to have one drink. I'm going to have 10, because I've earned it." You and I use entitlement at times as a way to say, "It's not temptation. It's just my choice and I deserve it."

If anyone was ever entitled to do whatever he wants, it obviously would be the one who made the heavens and the earth, the one who has done everything, and the one who was able to do anything. Yet we see Jesus set aside his entitlement this morning as we read from Luke. He didn't do it for any other reason than that he loves you and he loves me and he needed to be perfect in our place because you and I are filthy rotten sinners who love ourselves more than we love God very, very often.

So we see Jesus battling Satan on our behalf because we often choose not to. We choose to give in. We see Jesus using the Word of God on our behalf because so often we have more important things to do than to know the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit, which we see can kick Satan in the fanny, right? We see that in this Gospel account today.

As we consider Christ and what he does to pay for our sins this morning, we can learn to recognize temptation's twists, but above all, we can learn to recognize that we have one who was tempted like we are yet was without sin so that we have a Savior.

There is one thing you can say about Satan. He's no dummy. He hits us where we are weak. He doesn't think it's a great or noble thing for him to fight us in our strength. He fights us in our weakness. We see that with Jesus when he fasted for 40 days. Jesus, as true man, was obviously very hungry. Satan sees that weakness. He comes and pounces on it. It goes right back to the Garden of Eden again, doesn't it? "Did God really say?" "If you are the Son of God"...creating this doubt where obviously none exists. That's how Satan operates. "You know what? If you are truly the Son of God, you are obviously really hungry, why don't you just change this stone into bread?"

Jesus answers in a way that shows us for him to do this would have been sin. He says "It is written that man will not live on bread alone." The rest of the verse goes on but in every word that comes from the mouth of our God. So for Jesus, at that time and in that place, to change the stone into bread and to not continue his fast where he was setting himself aside and devoted to the Lord would have been sin. Satan hits him where he was weak as a human.

That's the same thing he does for us. We all have our own weaknesses, don't we? I don't care what it is. We might be prone to being angry or being cranky or being irritable and then just giving full vent to that anger and that crankiness and irritability and just saying, "That's the way it is. That's how I am. That's how my dad was and that's how my grandpa was, so that's how I am."

We might be prone to give in to the temptations of pleasure just like Tiger Woods did...sexual sins, affairs, to find comfort in someone else besides our spouse. Maybe that's where our weakness is and where Satan is going to hit us. Maybe it's alcohol. Maybe it's drugs. Maybe it's trying to escape the pressures of this world, not in the arms of a Savior, but in the bottom of a pill bottle or some other bottle.

We all have weaknesses and we need to recognize them. We are not the bastions of strength that our God once created in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve sinned. We are born in that sin. That means that we are at times incredibly weak, incredibly foolish and can rationalize things that we obviously know are wrong when someone else does them. But when we do them, there is a better reason for it.

We have to recognize this about ourselves. Then we have to act in a way that relies on God's strength and not on ourselves to help us in those areas where we are so weak. The way the Lord helps us is obvious. He helps us through his Word. He helps us through his Sacrament. Just like Otis this morning, we were baptized into Christ's perfection. His holiness covers us. That is a strength that is there for daily Godly living as we make use of it. Every day when we say "Lord, I know I am weak. Lord, I know I have sinned against you in this way or in that way. Lord, I know I'm prone to do it again, but I know I'm covered in your holiness. Lord, help me to fight against that temptation because you loved me first and you took away my sins." That's how God helps us...Word and Sacrament.

The second temptation that Satan brought was really one that I think we can sympathize with...the temptation to take a shortcut. I tell my students in class at times, "I went to school eight years, but it was to be a pastor, not an eye doctor. So, when I hand out a quiz to you, I'm not checking to see how well you can see your neighbor's paper." Yet, when I stand up in front and drink coffee while they write their test, I still see their eyes wander continually. Why is that?

Sometimes I think they are checking to see if they are too far behind the others. Sometimes I think it's just because they are trying to take a shortcut. "I didn't do the work. I don't know that passage. I know I should know that word, so I am just going to glance over at my neighbor and see if I can kind of see it. I'll just take the shortcut to get a better grade on this quiz." You and I are all prone to that. The shortcut mentality is kind of a sense of entitlement also, isn't it?

In the work place...are we tempted to compromise what we believe is right before God so that we can take a shortcut to getting ahead? Getting a promotion or earning someone else's favor even though we know what we would be doing is wrong before God. But if I step on someone else, I'll get ahead faster and farther. We need to recognize shortcuts often lead us on a path that goes against God's will. The end does not justify the means when the means is against God's will.

So how was Jesus' second temptation a shortcut temptation? In Luke's account, he has second Satan taking Jesus to that mountain and showing him all the kingdoms of the world in an instant and saying, "All this has been given to me." It's a flat out lie. It's not his. But it doesn't matter, Satan is a liar. That's what his name means. "Devil" means "liar." He says, "It's all been given to me. I'll tell you what. You've come to earth to redeem all the people and to redeem this entire world. Just bow down and worship me and I will give it to you. You don't have to go to the cross. You don't have to go through suffering. You don't have to keep living under the law perfectly in their place. Just one little thing...bow down and worship me and it's all over. You can go back to heaven, and you win." It's just a flat out lie. It's kind of like if you eat from the tree, you'll be like God, knowing good and evil. They would know good as they once were and evil as what they had now become. Not a good thing at all. But this is how Satan works. He lies and tells us shortcuts will achieve the goal, and the goal is all that matters.

No, what matters for you and me, as Christians, is living in a way that thanks God for the salvation he gave us, that lives in a way to honor God that he loved us enough to live in our place and die in our place because otherwise we would be condemned to hell. Christ's love, that love in doing that for us, compels us to live for him, not to take shortcuts just to say it will achieve a greater goal. That's sin. And for that sin, we too must repent.

Then comes the third temptation. As Luke has it, he takes it and builds up to where they end in Jerusalem, going not necessarily in historical order, but in order of leading to Jerusalem as the end. He has Jesus stand on the highest part of the temple. This temptation is what Satan has become very good at, which is twisting the Word of God.

He recognizes and knows Scripture. He knows that the offensive weapon that we have is the sword of the Spirit. He knows the one little word that can fell him is the Gospel. So he figures if he can twist the Word of God around in our minds, and he felt if he could twist the Word of God around and use it against Jesus, he could trip Jesus up. So he quotes the Psalm and says "Go ahead. Throw yourself down because God has promised that he'll give his angels charge over you."

That's a misapplication of Scripture. He was doing exactly what Jesus said. He was putting God to the test. God has said he will send his angels to keep watch over me and protect me. But he has also said "I've given you a brain. Why don't you use it once in awhile?" So when you are going to drive to Green Bay, don't close your eyes and say, "God will get me there." He's given you a brain. Don't put him to the test. But he has promised that he has angels that watch over us to take care of us in those times when we need the extra help that we ourselves cannot provide.

Look at the world around us. Look at how much of the world around us has succumbed to this temptation to twist the Word of God. There are many, many Christian churches in our country that no longer say that sin is sin. What God has said is sin, they say that part of the Bible doesn't apply anymore. Who do you think got them to say that? Satan is still constantly twisting the Word. The only way you can be on guard against this twisting of the Word is to know the Word. If you can't handle the Word of God, if you can't handle the sword of the Spirit, Satan can wrap you around his little finger if you don't know it. That's why it is so important that you get yourself into God's Word, either alone or with other Christians, so that as iron sharpens iron, one person may sharpen another.

I spend a lot of time offering you opportunities to do this. There are plenty of resources where you can do it on your own. But get into the Word of God so that someone can't twist it on you and make it say that left is right and right is left and then you nod your head in dumb mute agreement because you don't know the Word of God any better.

Then one of temptation's final twists is Satan will tempt us, but another meaning of his name is "accuser." He tempts us to do something. Then when we do it, he turns the tables and says, "Aha! Now you've done this, so God can't love you." I don't care what temptation you face, you and I are not going to face all of them perfectly. We live in a sinful world. So when we fall, cling to the cross of Christ. Know that he met every temptation in your place. He was perfect. His love for you is not dependent on how well you live for him. He loves you because he is a loving God. As a loving God, his greatest desire is that when you sin, you turn to him and you say, "Lord, for Jesus' sake forgive me." And he'll look you in the eye and say, "I already did." That's why Jesus hung on that cross. That's why that person poured that water over your head. That's why you eat that wafer and drink that wine...so that you can be assured that your sins are paid for and that you are right with God.