

A Shared Victory Luke 4:1-13

February 14, 2016

1st Sunday in Lent

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. Lent is a different kind of holiday season. Although our world has co-opted other Christian holidays for its own purposes, it doesn't quite know what to do with Lent (if, indeed, it has even heard of Lent.) Unlike Christmas, we don't put up Lenten trees and decorations. Unlike Easter, we don't have Lenten baskets filled with colored eggs and candy. Ultimately, Lent is confusing and even unpopular for our world because it is all about sin and solutions for it.

Our culture doesn't like sin because it ultimately doesn't believe in sin unless it is something horrific like a mass murder in a school. There are inappropriate choices and unfortunate behavior but nothing as cold and stark as sin. In fact, our culture has spent the last couple of generations trying to redefine sin out of existence. We rationalize our behavior and justify it by making all morality a matter of personal choice. It's no wonder that Lent and its emphasis on sin is such a non-starter in our world today. Sin is a foreign concept to many people today. No wonder they don't take Lent seriously.

What's more troubling is the fact that many in the Church are not troubled by sin either. They (or maybe you) think that being a church member and trying to be nice is all that God requires of you. Many Christians are like their cultural counterparts with regard to sin. They don't like to hear about it. They want positive upbeat messages in church. Lent's theme of sin and repentance doesn't quite fit the bill. Special times and opportunities for reflection and repentance are not taken advantage of because they are deemed unnecessary or unimportant. . Sin is often just not taken seriously within the church.

What's worse is that we also don't take seriously the originator of sin who seeks to tempt us to sin: the devil. Many in the world see the devil as some sort of cartoon-like character in red tights, horns on the head, and pitchfork in hand. Others see him as a cool character for t-shirts, tattoos, graffiti, and other expressions of pop culture.

Even in the church I don't think we take the devil very seriously. He is, of course, the main villain in the Bible and very bad. But many think they can handle the devil by just ignoring him. They think they can resist temptation and overcome sin just by trying harder not to do bad and trying even harder to do good.

We don't take the results of the devil's tempting very seriously either. Christians will say, after giving in to temptation, "Well, I'm only human" or "Nobody's perfect" as if these statements of fact somehow excuse sin. Some will say, "Well, I tried my best and God understands" as if this wish means somehow God accepts sin from sincere Christians.

The fact of the matter is that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" and "the wages of sin is death." This means the physical death of the body in the grave and the spiritual death of the soul and eventually the body in hell forever and for all. It doesn't matter if we've committed many sins or few sins; big sins or little sins. We are all guilty. Take it seriously.

As far as resisting the devil and not doing sin, you and I don't stand a chance. We think we are pretty good or pretty spiritual and think we can resist his temptations. That's one of his ploys: make us think that we are stronger than we are and that he is weaker than we think when, in fact, the devil is much stronger than we give him credit for. In fact, he is much more powerful than we can even imagine. Plus, the devil has had thousands of years to master his craft of temptation. He knows you and your weaknesses better than you do. What makes you think can stand up to the devil on your own? You can't. You will fail. Take him seriously.

But there is hope. There is help. There is one more thing to take seriously: your Savior Jesus Christ. There is help in dealing with temptation. There is hope in overcoming the Tempter, the devil, but probably not in the way you think.

Some will look at this text and think that it teaches that Jesus makes a good example. He shows you how to resist the devil and overcome temptation. All you have to do is be confident, try hard, and quote the Bible a lot. But no matter how hard you try and no matter how fine of an example Jesus is, you cannot defeat the devil. You will fail.

The problem is that we severely underestimate the nature of Jesus' mission. He did not come to be merely an example for us and show us how to do things right. Jesus came to take our place and do the work of saving us for us. He did not come to show us how to be human. He became human by being born as a baby boy in Bethlehem. Jesus did not come just to tell us to be baptized and to baptize others. Jesus Himself was baptized. And, in the area of temptation and overcoming the devil, Jesus did not show us how to resist temptation and overcome the devil and then wish us luck and tell us to try our best. No, Jesus came to resist temptation for you and overcome the devil for you. The three temptations in our text are representative of that battle and its results.

First, the devil tempts Jesus to use His powers – if He indeed is the Son of God – to command the stones to become bread. This would conflict with the Father's plan that the Son use His power only to help and save others. It was the first temptation of Adam and Eve, too: eat the fruit to satisfy their desires or obey the will of God. It is our temptation too. We are tempted to satisfy our desires for material goods more than paying attention to the Word of God. Jesus, while not denying the need for bread and other material good, refuses the temptation to place material goods above the will of God by speaking the Word of God: "Man shall not live by bread alone."

Secondly, the devil tempts Jesus to seek earthly power, rather than divine power, by listening to the devil and doing what He says: falling down and worshiping Him. That, too, was the temptation of Adam and Eve: be powerful like God by obeying the devil instead of God. We are tempted to do the same: to seek worldly power and glory at almost any expense – even if it means obeying the devil and His ways rather than God and His. Jesus refuses to take the easy way out in His mission of salvation by accepting worldly power to do it (even if the devil could give it). Rather, He says, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve."

Thirdly, the devil tempts Jesus to use a flashier, more popular way to accomplish the Father's plan of salvation than the dreariness and death of the cross. Jump off the top of the temple and float to earth on the hands of angels (as the devil implied by misquoting Scripture). That would get Him attention. That would get Him followers. Adam and Eve were tempted to want more than just having

every want and need met. They were tempted to desire the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In bringing God's plan of salvation, we are tempted to want more than the all-sufficient Word of God and His Holy Sacraments. We want something flashier and more popular that will get us more attention and more followers. Jesus refuses to take the bait and test God. Rather, Jesus says, "You shall not put the Lord, your God to the test."

Where Adam and Eve lost to the devil, Jesus won. Where you and I lose to the devil, Jesus wins. He does that, not to show off or make some sort of point. He doesn't have to. Jesus is taking our place in our battle against the devil and winning that battle against temptation so that we might share in His victory.

But there's more. Our text says, "And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time." We read about that "opportune time" on Ash Wednesday. Satan entered into Judas Iscariot and convinced him to betray Jesus. Satan influenced the religious leaders, the Romans, and the crowds to turn against Jesus and urge Him to come down from the cross and save Himself which would seal our doom and condemn us to hell. But Jesus refused this most difficult temptation. By staying on the cross to suffer and die, Jesus overcame sin, overcame death, and overcame hell. Jesus wins again. We share in His victory again.

We share in Jesus' victory because of our baptism. We were baptized into Christ. We were united to Him. That means what is His has become ours. His victory over temptation has become our victory over temptation. His defeat of the devil has become our defeat of the devil. His victory over sin has become our victory over sin. His defeat of death and hell has become our defeat of death and hell. As our Hymn of the Day puts it, "For, since he won the vict'ry there His vict'ry now we also share.

Does this mean we should not strive against temptation or that we will never give in to temptation again? No. We will give in to temptation and sin. We will follow the devil's way instead of God's ways. But remember that, in these battles against temptation, sin, and the devil, God has made a way to deal with our losses in battle. He imparts forgiveness of sin through His Word and

strength through His Holy Sacraments. Also remember that, although we struggle and lose some battles, Jesus has already won the war. We shall win the war as well.

Today, at the close of the service, you might wonder why we sing, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, something we usually only trot out in October for Reformation Day. However, this hymn is perfect for today and perfect for our battle against the devil and temptation

The old satanic foe
Has sworn to work us woe.
With craft and dreadful might
He arms himself to fight.
On earth he has no equal.

No strength of ours can match his might.
We would be lost, rejected.
But now a champion comes to fight,
Whom God Himself elected.
You ask who this may be?
The Lord of hosts is He,
Christ Jesus, mighty Lord,
God's only Son, adored.
He holds the field victorious.

Though hordes of devils fill the land
All threat'ning to devour us,
We tremble not, unmoved we stand;
They cannot overpower us.
Let this world's tyrant rage;
In battle we'll engage.
His might is doomed to fail;
God's judgment must prevail!
One little word subdues him

That "word" is the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, in whom we have the victory! Amen

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