

Matthew 4:1-11
First Sunday in Lent
February 26, 2023

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, immediately upon the heels of Jesus' baptism, the Gospel reading begins, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Jesus' baptism served a different purpose than our baptism, but the opening scene of his baptismal life certainly reminds us much of our baptismal life. Upon being baptized he is led by the Spirit (don't our post-communion prayers pray that God would 'rule our hearts and minds by Your Spirit?'), into the wilderness (isn't that a wonderful description of daily life in this fallen world?), to be tempted by the devil (isn't that a seemingly constant battle of the daily life?).

That Jesus is led into the wilderness should not surprise us; not only are we aware of such wilderness-wandering in our own lives until we reach the consummation of eternal bliss, but God even told the Israelites that He had a very specific discipline to teach them in their wilderness wandering: God's servant Moses says,

“You shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your hearts, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna... that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

Yes, specific plans to teach, humble, and discipline us in His Word, so that we see this wilderness wandering for what it truly is. That’s what Baptism and its teaching does. Certainly (and foremost), Baptism *saves*. But, it also gives birth to a New Adam who learns to see what this fallen world is really made of. That’s not to say Baptism leads us into an alternate reality of dogmatic delusions, while the rest of society lives in “the real world” and its care-free bliss. No, it's the same world. But, through Baptism, the new Christian is given eyes to see it for what it really is, to see God’s beautiful creation for what Sin has damaged and tainted it to be – a wilderness, full of dangers and vanities... but through which we are kept and sustained by God’s provision, pardon, and promises.

Of course, the faithless see the same exact world to be a far different place – a place of its own promises, pardon and

provision... but such *utopian* delusion is short-lived and – somewhere through this life – they, too, realize it is a wilderness of danger and vanities... but they have no baptismal foundation, and they despair and grow despondent. We even have a sociological term now for those whose lives end in “deaths of despair.”

Baptism saves us from that, preventing us from living in fanciful delusions to begin with. Instead, the Holy Spirit given us in our baptism brings us into the faith that clings to the truth which leads us to see the world for what it has become – one of the three great sources of temptation (“the devil, the *world*, and my sinful flesh,” Luther says); and, in such a global society of sin, the Lord humbles and disciplines us to keep a level-head throughout this wilderness wandering – not by trusting in ourselves, but by trusting in the Word of God, the Word of Truth.

Thus, the temptation of Jesus oddly brings us great comfort as we see him an example of sorts. He is led into a wilderness that brings with it burdens, problems – weariness, hunger, St Mark’s gospel even mentions “wild animals.” And our desire to be rid of such burdens and problems is what the devil uses to tempt, isn’t it?

That's what we know in our own life. We don't often see ourselves being tempted, as much as we see ourselves bearing burdens, wrestling with problems. And, as we're so focused on those burdens and problems, the devil entices and tempts us in ways we don't even recognize... until we've already gobbled the temptation whole as the supposed answer to our burdens and problems.

God does not alleviate this temptation by removing the burdens and problems, but by teaching the baptized to trust that His Word *has* and *is* the answer to our burdens and problems (and, therefore, temptations).

So, who of us doesn't have burdens right now – illness, depression, secret shame, difficulty stretching a dollar, family tensions, social pressures, a daily life socio-economically “worse off” than two years ago? And aren't these burdens and problems the source of our temptations?

That's where we make our mistake often, isn't it? We see burdens as the “divine problem” and see ourselves as victims of those ‘everlasting problems.’ But, burdens are daily life issues, not eternal life issues. And yet, in our love of (idolization of) this world and its daily bread, we interpret burdens to be matters of eternal significance... which leads us

into temptation to doubt, to despair, to “try something else”, maybe even “a different gospel”? Indeed, who of us can look to his own daily life and see himself quickly running to the Word of God to cling to *His* solutions for this world’s problems, rather than be tempted to despair of His Word, consider His Word irrelevant and without answers... and, therefore, tempted to challenge God to a match of wisdom, to put Him to the test, and take for myself what I “know” is best for my body and life?

And, because we sinners imperfectly, “unrighteously” have handled our temptations and have so regularly sinned when tempted by our burdens, we must have the Substitute come and not only die for our sins but also handle temptation perfectly for us.

In other words, if Baptism is going to endure life’s burdens without falling into temptation, it must be able to rejoice in the righteousness of Baptism’s Lord.

So, what does our Gospel reading tell us?: Jesus comes from His baptism and begins His journey to the cross by being led by the Spirit into the wilderness. He does so to righteously withstand temptation, to live according to God’s holy will, to depend completely on God’s Word (does not His every answer to temptation depend completely on the Word of God? – “It is

written...”). He righteously comes and withstands the devil’s temptation in the hour of temporal burdens... not merely to show us *how* to do so, but to do so on our behalf. For the salvation of mankind depends just as much on Christ’s righteous obedience as it does on Christ’s sacrificial suffering. For the suffering of a sinner atones for nothing and no one; the suffering of the righteous One atones for everything and everyone, as Paul says in our epistle reading, “By the one man’s obedience, the many are made righteous.”

Therefore, in Christ’s temptation, we see our righteousness – for He is righteousness on our behalf, for our salvation. Even his sacrificial death is an act of His righteous obedience to the Father he loves, as Peter’s epistle says, “He suffered once, the righteous for the unrighteous that He might bring us to God.”

Notice that: “to bring us to God”... as in ‘the hope of the Baptized.’ Christ is the One who reunites us with God. And so, Christ crucified not only brings us to God in redemption, but also in our baptismal life brings us to love God’s holy ways and trust His Holy Word as we wander in the wilderness, trusting that He will be that ‘bright cloud’, that pillar of cloud that leads

us through the wilderness, that Joshua who delivers us unto the promised land.

In fact, notice – in our epistle reading – Paul says, “Death reigned from Adam to Moses.” Why “Adam to Moses?” Is Moses the fullness of the Old Testament? No, for (as we heard last week) Elijah also is on the mountain of glory? Is Moses chronologically the end of the Old Testament? No, obviously the judges, kings and prophets all come after him. But, Moses illuminates the Law with the stone tablets. But also perhaps it’s “from Adam to Moses” because after Moses is Joshua, who brings the people to God. Joshua, who brings them into the promised land. Certainly we ought see Jesus as the New Adam, but we are also right to see the one who righteously exits the wilderness as the greater Joshua, who *brings us* to God.

So, knowing our sins have been atoned for, and we have been redeemed by Christ our righteousness, and led by our greater Joshua, we may learn from him to love God’s holy will, to resist temptation and to depend upon His Word in all circumstances. Let us not make the mistake of thinking that Christ endured the wilderness for us that we that we may now endure it without Him. Nor let us think that He has equipped us

with our own wisdom, our own resolve, our own strength to resist the devil. Do we have any reason to doubt God's Word in *our* temptations when Christ so completely depended upon it in His temptation?

And yet, with His Word, He *does* equip the baptized. How does Luther's hymn say it, "He's by our side upon the plain with his good gifts and Spirit." Why does Jesus give us the Holy Spirit in Baptism if not because He knows the burdens of daily life? Don't the Scriptures say He sympathizes with us in our weaknesses? And, how does He sympathize, but by giving us the Holy Spirit, by forgiving us our sins, and by strengthening us with His gifts.

Sympathizes because he knows – down to the temptation – what man is tempted with. Did he not face every temptation from the devil that the first Adam did (we can speak of the first Adam being tempted because, Genesis says, he was there with his wife, allowing her to be tempted!). Yes, we certainly are meant – by the Scripture itself – to see Jesus as the second Adam. The combination of our three readings obviously wants us to recognize Jesus as the second Adam, as St Paul well illustrates:

“If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”

And so, just as the *first* Adam, the *second* was tempted: with that which was good for good, gifts pleasing to the eye, that which would prove Him wiser than God. (And, as Genesis 2 says that every tree/fruit of the garden was good for food and pleasing to the eye, then it is truly that final description that is the very heart of temptation for us all – “desirable to make one wise”, wise as God...put God to the test and show him, “not Thy will, but mine be done.”) Yes, even Jesus was tempted in this way, tempted in every way as the first Adam, but he proved himself the faithful husband... the faithful husband who did not stand by and watch his bride die, but who intervened for His Bride, the faithful husband who now sympathizes with his easily deceived bride.

Thus, his love for us is not to pay for sins, then simply allow us to constantly be deceived by temptation. Through His

apostles, he exhorts us not to be deceived, but equips us for the temptation. How does the apostle say it? St Paul reminds us to

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for our feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is *the word of God*.

Or, to summarize all of that, live every day with Baptism’s confidence to rejoice in its Savior and to learn from him to say in all temptation, “It is written.”

So, when the Baptized see the world for what it truly is, the Gospel is even more glorious than Christ dying on the cross for us; it’s also Christ defending and preserving us today with

His gifts and Spirit. And, with the Christ for us, who can be against us? With Christ forgiving us, who can condemn us? With Christ appealing to the Father on our behalf, who can accuse us? We may continue through the wilderness safely behind the pillar of cloud, strengthened with manna from heaven, taught by God's holy will, brought through the wilderness by the One who himself has endured it, and – finally – delivered to the promised land by our greater Joshua, to dwell in the new creation of the second Adam.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

Rev. Mark C. Bestul
Calvary Lutheran Church
February 26, 2023