

## **“Victory over the Devil”**

**Luke 4:1-13**

**The First Sunday in Lent + March 6, 2022**

**Dear Friends in Christ,**

**I was going to start off with a humorous story, but it just doesn't seem fitting. The text touches on a very serious topic, a topic that confronts us on a daily basis: the deadly attacks of our vicious and dangerous enemy, the devil. A contest is unfolding before us. It is not just the contest between Jesus and the devil, it is the struggle against the devil that we and our children face every day. Since the battle that Jesus fights here is also the battle that we fight, let us take it seriously. First, we will take a look at the combatants; secondly, we will look at a blow-by-blow account; and third, we will look at the results for us.**

**— I —**

**Take a look, first of all, at our enemy, the devil. His name means “slanderer.” That means he is always on a smear campaign. Worse than any political master of spin, he is always slinging mud. Before man, he would like to smear our view of God, to slander and dishonor and blaspheme the holy and gracious name of the Lord. His lies tricked our first parents into thinking that God was being stingy by not creating them to know evil as well as good. He fools people into thinking that God is something that He is not so that they will reject God. Before God, the devil would love to accuse us. He desires to come before God with a list of all our sins so that God would condemn us forever to hell.**

**By the time Jesus meets the devil in the wilderness, the devil has had thousands of years of experience. He has practiced and polished his skills so that he has his best game on. Who has he failed to defeat at one time or another? When you look at the major heroes of faith in the Bible you recognize that they all fell into sin at one time or another, sometimes in spectacular fashion.**

**The devil has the power to get his message across to Jesus. The devil is permitted to lead Jesus around to where he wants Him to be. He takes Jesus up and shows Him all those kingdoms. “He took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple” (v.9). To be able to take Jesus and put Him where he wants Him to be—that is a lot of authority that God allows him to have. Like Job of old, Jesus is given over into the hand of the devil (Job 2:6). If the**

**devil can do all that to make his point with Jesus, who are we to think that he is not able to get into our head? We are foolish to think that we are somehow immune to his voice.**

**We are not told how the devil appeared to Jesus. I have seen artwork where he is pictured as a wicked and diabolical creature. But remember that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). He may very well have appeared to Jesus looking just like Gabriel or Michael or one of the other angels.**

**On the other side of the conflict there is a 30-year old carpenter from Galilee. Yes, we know Him to be the Son of God, the only-begotten Second Person of the Holy Trinity from all eternity, Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today and forever. He can't possibly fail! He is not the devil's equal, He is the Creator of all, including the Creator of the angels, one of whom turned against God and led a rebellion and was expelled from heaven—the one we know as the devil.**

**This is all true, yet Jesus is not standing there using His divine power. He is standing there weak and hungry like one of us, our Brother, having left all that divine power on the shelf, so to speak. This is our Substitute, the One standing in for us. This is the One of whom the Scriptures says, "For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). He does not answer the devil out of a whirlwind as when He spoke to Job or boom out His voice with thunder as He did on Mt. Sinai. There is no glorious throne on which He is sitting, no glorious legion of angels eager to take out the devil for him. There is just the weak, hungry, thirty-year old carpenter from Galilee, just coming from the Jordan River where He had been baptized and declared to be the beloved Son of God.**

**We know that these three temptations are just a sampling of many; there must have been one temptation after another during those forty days. We know that the devil returned to tempt Him again and again throughout His visible ministry.**

**This is not the first test for a child of God. Adam and Eve were in paradise, with nothing but goodness around them, and they believed the devil's lies and ate from the forbidden fruit. The Children of Israel, whom God formed into a nation and of whom He said "Israel is my firstborn son" (Exodus 4:22)—Israel was tempted in the wilderness for forty years, and time after time**

they fell into the sin of unbelief. They grumbled and chafed at God's provision for them. A whole generation had to pass before they could enter the Promised Land. And, how often hasn't the devil won victories over us, who consider ourselves children of God? Now, what would happen with Jesus, God's only-begotten Son? Let's take a look.

— II —

In the first of the temptations, the devil appeals to Jesus' hunger, trying to get Him to do something just to satisfy His appetite. "The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread'" (v.3). That is to say, "Remember that voice from heaven that declared You were God's beloved Son? Well, prove it! Show that you believe it! Surely God wouldn't want His beloved Son to go hungry!" How often doesn't the devil try similar strategies with us? Instead of living and acting by the word of God, we want to live and act by what feels good, by that which will satisfy our appetites. The very first temptation from the devil involved food, and he is still trying his old tricks. Instead of trusting that God will provide for us, that He will take care of us and feed us all that we need, we just want to do what we want to do, what feels good and satisfying to quench the slightest discomfort or desire of our fleshly appetites. Jesus answers Him, not with a thunderbolt, but with a simple word from the Bible, a word that He had probably memorized as a child: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone' " (v.4). Life is more than food! Life is the gift of God—the gift He gives by the word of His Spirit.

In the Second temptation the devil promises an easy road to glory for Jesus: "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 all be yours' " (vv.5-7). No doubt the devil showed Him the great pyramids of Egypt, the great temples that the Greeks had built, the glory of Rome. It is true that the devil has influence in the world and that many world leaders are in his hand, but it is a lie that he can give that authority and glory to whomever he will. Truth be told, the devil is on a leash; he can only do what God lets him do. But he entices Jesus with an easy road to glory: just bow down to Satan and all those kingdoms will be yours. How awful that would have been! Yes, Jesus would be over us, but Satan would have been over Jesus! We would have been forever still under the cruel reign in

**the devil's kingdom. Jesus would have none of it; He knows that the road for him to gain glory and to be given all authority in heaven and on earth is for Him to humble Himself and be obedient to His Father in heaven, yes, obedient even unto the cross. Jesus again turns away the temptation with a quotation from the Book of Deuteronomy: "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve' " (v. 8).**

**The devil has seen how Christ has won by using the word of God. In the third temptation he tries to do the same: "And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the 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). Yes, this is written in the Bible, but the use of it is absurd! You parents tell your children that you love them and will always be there for them. What kind of child would deliberately commit a crime, get arrested, and then tell you, "I just wanted to test whether you would really be here for me or not." What kind of child would do such a thing? Such a child, if he truly loves you, would also remember the many other things that you told them, such as your warnings against hurting other people or taking their property.**

**The devil would like nothing better here than to see Jesus go "splat" on the rocks below. He would like to be rid of Him once and for all, so he quotes a Scripture and neglects to put along side of it other important things that God has said. For example, what about God's commandment not to murder? Surely that includes prohibiting suicidal behavior. What about the sacredness of human life, and, above all, the command not to put the Lord your God to the test? That would certainly include an understanding that we are not to unnecessarily put our lives at risk. The devil uses the strategy of false teachers throughout the ages. They find something in the Bible and run with it while deliberately ignoring other statements from God that touch on the same issues. Jesus lets the whole counsel of God speak when He counters, again from the book of Deuteronomy: "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test' " (v.12).**

— III —

Finally we come to the results. What does all this mean for us? It means that salvation was not derailed. The devil left Jesus, if only for a time. It means that Jesus followed through with all that the Father planned for Him to do. The devil returned to Him again and again. One time Peter tried to talk Jesus out of dying on the cross and Jesus had to tell Peter, “Get behind me, Satan” (Matthew 16:23). We know the temptations continued as Christ suffered in the Garden. We know Satan was behind the plot of Judas to have Jesus delivered over and killed.

But we also know that Jesus gained the victory, not just in this particular battle in the wilderness, but also in the entire war. Consider the encounter with Jesus when He descended into hell. This was not to suffer there; no, His suffering was complete when He said, “It is finished” on the cross. This was a victory lap for the risen Christ, the spiking of the ball in the end zone. This was Christ, having been put to death for our sins but raised in His body, getting into the face of the devil and telling Him: “I win! You lose. My people are free now and forever.” Consider the encounter when Satan is judged on the Last Day: “And devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur... tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 20:10).

Through faith in Christ Jesus we taste that victory now. We can resist the devil’s temptations. He can no longer accuse us before God in heaven. Yes, the devil and/or one of his demonic helpers can speak lies into your ear, but the word of God will chase Him away in the name of Jesus. When little infants are brought to the Baptismal Font we speak words of faith telling us that Christ in that child is renouncing all the works and ways of the devil. In Holy Baptism, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we renounce all the works and ways of the devil. This only works because Jesus has conquered the devil for us, and in Baptism He attaches us to Himself. Indeed, as baptized children of God we can sing with great joy: “Satan, hear this proclamation: / I am baptized into Christ! / Drop your ugly accusation / I am not so soon enticed. / Now that to the font I’ve traveled, / All your might has come unraveled, / And, against your tyranny, / God my Lord unites with me” (LSB 594 st.3). Amen.