

PASTOR GWEN'S MESSAGE
2ND WEDNESDAY OF LENT
"YOU ARE NOT ALONE"
WEDNESDAY MARCH 16, 2022

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

The Sunday worship we all missed due to the ice storm had the wonderful Gospel text of the Devil tempting Jesus in the wilderness after his 40-day fast. Not hard to understand that the devil comes to Jesus and to us in our weakest moments when we are vulnerable. However, the text for tonight is a reversal where the devil tried to take advantage of Jesus in His moments of strength. Sounds a bit odd, doesn't it? What hope might the devil have in these moments when Jesus is at his strongest?

Let's look at what is happening in our Gospel text this evening. Jesus is using his power to perform cures and cast out demons. These signs are proof that he is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. The people are witnessing all these signs and so are the Pharisees.

Usually when I say the word Pharisee, I tend to go to overdrive with negative thoughts. I believe that we think of Pharisees as the bad guys, so our dander goes up to beware. But in our Scripture today, we are told that this same group tells Jesus to flee, to get away because they believed that Herod was

going to seek out and kill Jesus. That does not exactly sound like something the bad guys, or guys out to discredit Jesus would say, does it?

Whatever their motivation, this warning to Jesus does seem like true concern for his welfare. It is good to be reminded that several of the Pharisees were secret disciples of Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea for one was the Pharisee that went to Pilot to claim Jesus body so it would be put in a proper tomb. Then there was Nicodemus, another Pharisee that talked openly with Jesus about being born again. Even our favorite Saul, who become Paul is a Pharisee. He did persecute Christians but was converted and helped grow the Christian church. So yes, it is possible that the Pharisees who were warning Jesus were sincere in their caution to Jesus. But on the other hand, maybe they just wanted Jesus to go away so He would be distracted from His ministry and His goal of going to Jerusalem.

Well, what I tend to believe is that Jesus already knew what was in His future. He understood how Herod operated. Afterall, it was this Herod's father who made the effort to eliminate Him years before by killing all the baby boys in Bethlehem under the age of two. Jesus also knew that it was this Herod that had just killed his friend and cousin, John the Baptist. Herod was a ruthless tyrant and was all about getting rid of anything or anyone he viewed as a threat to his power.

And so how does Jesus respond to this warning. He responds without intimidation that he is on a mission and refuses to be distracted from the mission that His Father in heaven has set before Him. This took great fortitude on the part of Jesus. It was another temptation by the devil who suggested through these Pharisees that Jesus abandon this ministry and run to save himself.

But we know that Jesus did not do this. Jesus held his ground and kept his eyes on the mission. This mission was to deliver God's grace and mercy to a hurting world. He will continue to head to Jerusalem and be put to death, a horrible death on a cross. This act needed to be fulfilled because Jesus was to die for our salvation. No temptation can dissuade Him from bringing forgiveness, abundant life, and the promise of eternal life to His followers from the day of His resurrection from the grave.

There was no doubt what Jesus was sent to do. I wish I could be so bold and say that I never have doubts. But human me cannot do that. I do get tempted by the evil in the world, even though I can often call it by name. I do not have

the will power to fend off Satan's evil temptations, like Jesus could. Even the devils' subtle temptations are often too much to handle. So, what do we do, how do we handle temptations?

First, we realize that the Devil is present every single day of our lives. He wants to keep us from God, from worshipping him and having a relationship with our Father in Heaven. We cannot let the devil win the battle. Secondly, the best way to do that is to realize that you are not in this fight alone. God walks with us every step of the way. God knows how difficult fending off the evil one is. He knew how hard it was and still is, to defeat the power of the devil because Jesus experienced it first-hand as a human.

So, when you face Satan square on, know that Jesus is beside you, you are not alone. Jesus will give you the strength to resist the tempter's power. During this Lenten season, set your faces toward Easter, just as Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem and the cross. Know that He will walk with you and protect you with the amazing grace and mercy of God. **AMEN**