

Sermon Lent 1 2018

February 18, 2018

Mark 1:9-15

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read, especially these words: “And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.”

Temptation. I don't know if you heard on the news recently, but this issue of temptation has gotten some coverage. Not in the sense that certain kinds of temptation were brought up as particularly newsworthy, I think as a culture we've gone far past that for most things. Rather, the news was that Pope Francis was talking about wanting to change the wording of the Lord's Prayer. He wanted to change the wording from what we all know: “Lead us not into temptation,” to something he sees as less incriminating toward God, “do not let us fall into temptation.” From what I understand, his rationale was somewhat drawn from the passage we read from James, but I also read that there was a discussion that this would reflect the original Aramaic that Jesus would have spoken.

Now I don't want to get too far off on a tangent, but this idea that we should be looking for this Aramaic is a bit problematic, because we don't know for sure that the Gospels were ever recorded in any language besides the Greek that we have them in. This means that while Jesus most likely did speak in Aramaic, even giving His prayer to His disciples in that language, when the pen hit the paper, there's a good chance the Holy Spirit inspired that writing in Greek. That means that what we have now would indicate what was intended for us, and the Greek says, “Lead us not into temptation.” But even as we look at that, in light of the fact that we are in the first week of Lent and we have Jesus' temptation, it's good for us to meditate on temptation a bit.

If you recall the Catechism's teaching on the sixth petition, that we have just been talking about, you might recall Luther says there, “God tempts no one.” James says that as well, and then expands on it saying, **“each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”** In this James gives us a vivid picture of sin, of its manifestation and ultimately of its end: death. But as he does this, his point should be well taken. Each person is tempted by what? By his own desire. But how? When he is lured and enticed.

Now this luring is like a drawing away. In particular, it is being drawn away from a place, or from the right way. This is the only time this word is used in the New Testament, so there isn't as much to say about that. But this enticement, there's a bit more. It's something that has a connotation of catching something by baiting it.

Peter speaks about this enticement in his second letter. In fact, he says that there are people who will try to do this to us. He talks about these people as being **“those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority,”** and what he says that they do is that they **“they entice unsteady souls.”** He describes how these people live in all sorts of revelry and sin and they try to draw others to that. He says, **“speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error.”** In other words he says that these people try to bait others into sinfulness. They try to entice others by sensual passions.

For us we should take heed. In fact as we consider this, what’s our defense? Always the Word of God right? If these people try to draw us into false teaching we should know the Word. If they try to draw us into sinful behavior, we should know the Word. I haven’t said it in a while, but this is why you should have the commandments memorized, and work toward memorizing Luther’s explanations as well. As I am often telling you to read your Bible daily, also take a commandment a day and meditate on it and Luther’s explanation. God uses all of this to help us against this enticement from others.

Of course, even as I say that, it’s not as though this isn’t still a challenge. I talked about how Peter uses this word for baiting us into sin in relation to the enticement from others. But that’s not what James describes is it? He says that comes from within ourselves. Even when others try to bait us, the draw still comes from ourselves, from our own desires.

And why do we want to sin? What’s the bait to draw us in? My vicarage supervisor used to say it so eloquently: “Sin is fun.” When we have that temptation it looks enticing because it looks pleasurable, doesn’t it? No one wants to be the fuddy-duddy and not have fun. And sin is fun. And there that desire leads to enticement, and that enticement leads to sin and that sin leads to death.

But so far all I have talked about is us. What about Jesus? At the beginning I said I would talk about Jesus’ temptation. Well, what we have to understand is that this is just what the Devil was trying to do to Jesus. He was trying to entice Him. He was trying to draw Jesus away from faithfulness. He was trying to entice Jesus to fall prey to the bodily pleasures, comforts which in this broken world would lead Him away from His Heavenly Father.

Mark in fact tells us that Jesus was out in the wilderness with the wild animals, and one of the commentators I read said that this was indicative of Jesus being alone. He was away from other men, He was secluded so the devil was trying to bait Him into sin.

And we don't see this in Mark, but think about how he tried to bait the hook. Even the first temptation—do you remember the first temptation? Here Jesus has been fasting forty days, and the Devil comes and baits the hook with the most enticing temptation: “use your power to feed Your famished belly. Use this power that You have as the Son of God and turn this rock into bread.” In fact, do you see that there's a double edged enticement here? Feed Yourself, that's one; and the other: prove you are who You say You are. Prove you are the Son of God.

And then the Devil went on with the enticement, trying to bait Jesus into proving that power again by having the angels attend to Him by jumping off the heights of the temple, and then by promising the kingdoms of the world to Him. And there was great bait there. Think about that. Jesus knew that the Kingdom of God was promised to Him, was promised through Him, but that meant the cross, right? That meant the suffering for the sins of the whole world. That meant His bleeding and His dying. How much easier to have the kingdoms of the world and all of the pleasures and comforts that come with them? How much easier to just take it all right then, no pain, no suffering? I think that's a hook that we would all be very tempted to take in.

But our Lord Jesus didn't. In this power struggle between Jesus and the Devil, Jesus proved His strength. He proved His mettle. He proved His faith: He trusted that what the Heavenly Father had promised would be true and would be far better.

In fact, we see a prefiguring of this trust in Abraham—we see a picture of what that looked like on a smaller level where Abraham was asked to sacrifice Isaac. Here God had said that Abraham's descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. God had promised Abraham's line would continue and would continue through Isaac. But then God asked for Abraham to take Isaac up the mountain and kill him, sacrifice him. Can you imagine the conflict there? How is that going to work? Did God rescind His promise? Did He change His mind? Did I do something to make God so mad that He decided that I don't deserve this anymore? You can imagine how he would teeter on despair.

But Abraham didn't despair. He trusted God in the midst of all of that. We don't know what that looked like for sure. Maybe he thought that even should Isaac die and the fire consume him as the sacrifice on that altar, God would raise him from those ashes. Even if the ashes were raised a millennia later, the promise is still true. This is what faith says.

I was reading Luther's comments on this and he makes a great point about the conflict there. He says, *“Wherever we experience the opposite of a promise, we should maintain with assurance that when God shows Himself differently from the way the promise speaks, this is merely a temptation. Therefore we should not allow this staff of the*

promise to be wrested from our hands... Nearly all people are tempted by despair, and the godlier they are, the more frequently they are attacked with this weapon of Satan. What else should you do in this situation than say: 'I know that I am baptized and that God, for the sake of His Son, has promised me grace. This promise will not lie, even if I should be cast into utter darkness.'" That's what our faith should say.

But just like with Jesus, the devil wants to bait us out of that faith. He wants to tempt us from that trust. As we hear those words of Luther, then, they should ring in our ears. Wrestling this week with yet another school shooting. Reflecting on the culture around us, reflecting on how far our culture has fallen and how quickly, that can make us fall into despair, can't it? This is our hope in the midst of that trial that God's promises will not fail. This is our hope that Jesus proves in His faithfulness, in His trust in the midst of temptation, in the midst of His enticement.

In fact as we reflect on this enticement, we should take note of something: Jesus' faithfulness here, and ultimately his faithfulness at Gethsemane and Calvary turned the tables on the devil. Here the devil was enticed. Here the bait was on the hook for him. Here he thought he had his chance to win once for all. Draw all these people into a frenzy and get them to crucify this Son of God. No one comes back from death. The victory would finally be his.

But when the devil bit on that hook, what happened? He was wrong. He failed. This apparent victory actually sealed his defeat. The cross wasn't the victory for the devil, it was the Trojan Horse, which once activated allowed Jesus to crush that serpent. He was ruined. And in the resurrection of Jesus, Jesus' victory was declared. It was declared over sin, over death, it was declared that all temptation, all succumbing to temptation has been overcome. In fact, for you Christian all your succumbing to temptation has been forgiven, even your inclination to fall into despair. You are that baptized child. You are the one cleansed of that sin. You are the one forgiven. And in Christ you are the one to whom He gives the power to not succumb, as weak and frail as you are. Not in your own strength. You can't do by saying "don't give in, don't give in." He works this in you as He speaks to you in His Word. He works this in you as He feeds you His body and blood. He worked this in His own temptation. He works this as you pray, "Lead us not into temptation." Lord, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Amen.