

Sermon: 11th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matthew 16:21-28

Theme: A Big Temptation!

Goal: To focus on Christ, the crucified and resurrected, to overcome temptation.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: The Watchword for St. Thomas for this year is: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good” (Rom 12:21). It comes from the Epistle for this Sunday and is related to the Gospel. Peter didn't know that Watchword when he rebuked Jesus in our Gospel, and he was overcome by the Devil; and he became a big “stumbling block” to Jesus, a big temptation, trying to talk Jesus out of His mission on the cross. Satan uses even our closest friend to lead us into temptation and to take us away from God's way and the salvation. The Gospel is a strong warning against temptations and the strategies that Satan uses, and a guideline for how we shall follow Jesus even through the cross in our lives to overcome evil and Satan.

I – Peter

If you remember, The Gospel of last Sunday showed us when Peter had confessed Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God”(v.16) and how Jesus praised Peter because of this strong confession of faith. Jesus even changed the name of Peter- who had been called “Simon, son of Jonah” - to Peter, that means “a rock”! His faith was firm like a rock, and Peter himself was always answering on behalf of the other disciples, as a strong leader among them.

But the same Peter, that was very strong in the first moment and who was called as “blessed” by Jesus, - now is called as “Satan” by Jesus just some minutes after. What had happened?

After Jesus was sure that His disciples believed in Him as the promised Messiah, Jesus began to prepare them for His death and resurrection. This is the very first time that Jesus speaks in details about His suffering and death: “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

The disciples were so shocked with this, that they didn't even notice that Jesus finished His teaching talking about His resurrection. Jesus presented the whole plan of God: His death on behalf of all of us and His resurrection. - We know from the story of the Holy Week that none of the disciples remembered that He had spoken about His resurrection. They were all sad and disappointed! They were not expecting that He would come back to life again! Only “after He was raised from the dead, His disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken” (John 2:22).

Because they couldn't understand why Jesus needed to suffer, “Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

II – Satan

This was a big temptation to Christ! like when Satan himself tempted Him for three times, as we read in Matthew chapter 4, trying to talk Jesus out of His way to the cross, offering Him wealth and power without suffering, - now Satan uses Peter to tempt Jesus to avoid the cross. This is what Satan wanted to achieve. “This shall never happen to you!”, said Peter. Peter didn't want to see his Friend and Leader suffering. He was not aware that The Messiah was also The Suffering Servant of the Lord, as written in Isaiah 53.

I always remember my mother, a very faithful woman, when she was old and sick, close to her death. I visited her in the hospital where she was admitted and she said to me: *“The devil is very strong!”* She was suffering temptations in her faith. I don't know what kind of temptations; but I felt she was disturbed. I prayed with her, assuring her that God is stronger and holds His children in His gracious hand. *“I know, I believe!”* she answered.

Satan used Peter, the best friend of Jesus, to tempt Him. Satan even transforms himself in an Angel of Light to confuse Christians. He is also called by some people as “Lucifer”= light bearer (Isaiah 12:21, Septuaginta). We need to learn from this, as John wrote in his First Letter (4:1): “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

The name Satan means “Adversary”; and devil means “Accuser”. This is really what he is. He is God's adversary and he accuses us before God, trying to condemn us. We need to be aware of his strategies to deceive God's children and we need to be alert! If he didn't spare Jesus, the Son of God, how much more he will try to deceive us and to take us away from God's paths.

III – Jesus

But Jesus conquered against Satan and Jesus is the Victor over him! And we know and believe that Jesus' victory is our victory! *“His resurrection from the dead was part of the divine plan. It proclaimed Satan's defeat. It proved that God had accepted His Son's death in our place. It was God's public absolution. Jesus had turned God's wrath away.”* (LCMS – A, p. 116).

Jesus didn't talk in a “soft” way with Peter, saying: “Come, Peter, let me explain to you better what is going to happen; you do not understand my teaching....” NO! Jesus was rude with Peter, because Jesus knew that it was Satan speaking through His friend. And Jesus

“turned and said: Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

The same “strong rock=Peter” now was a “stumbling stone = a weak Peter” on Jesus' way. We have to dismiss Satan as soon as possible, before we fall into temptation. When Cain was tempted and hated his brother, God said to him: “Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it” (Gen 4:7). Unfortunately Cain didn't master it, and Cain killed his brother Abel. This happens when we don't fight with Jesus' weapons against temptations and Satan.

To “have in mind the things of men” and not “the things of God” (as Jesus says in our text) is to be selfish and self-centered; is to do what we think that is right, and not what God says in His Word; is to follow our own paths, and not God's paths of righteousness and justice. People and churches are turning from the truth to follow deceived teachings. We need to hold firm on Jesus and on His promises. With Him, we are conquerors; or, as Paul says, “more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37).

Conclusion: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good”. The Watchword must be a daily reality in our lives. It's not only Satan that is fighting against us to push us down to sin; but, as Luther mentioned, the Christians have three big enemies: Satan, the world, and our own flesh! We need to cling to Jesus, to seek strength on Him, to look to Him only, to “overcome evil by good”. The hymn that we will sing now warns us about this: *“Raise, my soul, to watch and pray.”* Listen to the words of the hymn and sing it with your whole heart. And Paul wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor 10:13) “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle
Cape Town, 28 August 2011