

Sermon: 1st Sunday in Lent

Text: Mark 1:9-15 – The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus

Theme: Jesus begins His way to the cross

Goal: To follow Jesus along His paths during Lent Season and to be a victor through and with Him.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: We have here three different stages of the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus: His baptism, His temptation and His preaching. “Jesus was about thirty years old when He began His ministry” (Luke 3:23). The Bible doesn't tell us anything about Jesus' life between the age of 12 to 30 years. But now He came from His home town Nazareth to begin His public ministry. This is the official beginning of His path that would eventually take Him to the cross. Therefore this text marks the beginning of Lent Season. And we will go with and follow Jesus on His path until His glorious victory over Satan and death on Easter Sunday! His victory is our victory as well by faith in Him. Whatever He did, was on our behalf and for our salvation.

I - His Baptism

We know that Jesus didn't need to be baptized. Baptism is for remission of sins, and Jesus didn't have any sin. But He carried on Him our sins and paid for them on the cross. Therefore He had to be baptized as well, on our behalf, because, as He answered to John the Baptist, “it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt 3:15).

Jesus identified Himself with humankind in all things, becoming our substitute. The Apostle Paul wrote, “God made him (Jesus) who had no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

At Jesus' baptism, God Father Himself introduced His Son to the world: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I'm well pleased”. And the Holy Spirit descended on Him. This was absolutely necessary for what was to come: Jesus' temptation. Jesus, and we as well, can never face Satan alone, by ourselves, without the presence of God in us. We have to be baptized and to receive the Holy Spirit to confront Satan and to win. If we stand only by ourselves, we will always fall into temptation. If Satan tried to lead Jesus into temptation, what about us? He will tempt us too. But Jesus, as we have said, was not alone when He went to the desert to be tempted. And we can be sure that we are not alone either when we struggle with sins and temptations.

II – His Temptation

It always bothered me that “at once the Spirit sent Him out into the desert... to be tempted by Satan”. How can God throw His Son into the lion's den? But one of the Bible Commentary that I read gave me a good answer to that question: God didn't wait until Satan came to tempt Jesus; *He took the initiative to confront Satan! Jesus let Satan know right away that He was in charge!* (Series B, 90).

Another text I read this week is from Zechariah 14:9. God says about His people: “I will refine them like silver and test them like gold.” How do you refine silver and test gold? By fire! But then the promise follows: “They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God'.”

We need to be aware that Satan doesn't want us to commit this or that sin only. He wants us as a whole! *The stakes are much higher than a few moral or immoral acts. Lurking behind every temptation is the temptation to unbelief. When we do not believe, Satan has us.* (Series B 90). This was the situation with Jesus' temptation as well. Satan was testing Jesus' confidence in God's provision and care, and His faithfulness to the Father. Jesus passed the first test. Others would come. The final one would be on Good Friday, when Jesus was

arrested, His disciples fled and left Him alone, and Jesus died alone on the cross. Jesus' enemies thought they had won. But on Easter morning God showed who had won: Christ, the Victor over Sin, over death and over Satan! His victory is our victory by faith. Like His victory over Satan at the first temptations, so was His victory over Satan at the last temptation as well. Jesus is the Victor!

III – His Preaching

And this was His message as He began to preach: “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.” Jesus was able to announce good news because He Himself was the King of God's Kingdom. He was anticipating His victory when He called people to enter the Kingdom of God. He came to free people from Satan's power and to give us the right to become children of God (John 1:12). A new life is possible with Jesus.

But we know by personal experience that in spite of the victory Jesus assures us, Satan doesn't give up. He wants us back to his kingdom of darkness and sin. He still tempts us with all sort of temptations. Each age of our lives has it's own temptations. Therefore, part of Jesus' teaching was to teach His disciples how to pray. And in the Lord's Prayer He included two petitions, against temptation and against the devil: And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (or : from the devil). Martin Luther explained in a very nice and simple way what we are praying for in these two petitions. He wrote: *“God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.”* Luther wrote about The Seventh Petition: *“We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.”*

We need to be strengthened in our faith to face temptations. We strengthen our body by eating good food and practicing physical exercises, so that we are able to walk, to work, to live. We strengthen our soul by eating the spiritual food God offers us: His Word and the Sacrament, and practicing spiritual exercises of obedience and good deeds. Jesus had a very good answer to each of the temptations saying “It is written”. He quoted God's promises and God's will from the Old Testament to confront Satan. He could have used other weapons to conquer the enemy. But He used a weapon that we can and have to use as well; God's Word. Against temptations and doubts that can lead us to temptations, let us search in God's Word and answer “It is written!” Our faith is not based on the air or on some personal experiences or on “sinking sand”, but it is based on the written Word of God, who assures forgiveness of our sins, life and eternal salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, our Saviour. This (the Bible) is our weapon.

Conclusion: Luther was absolutely aware about Satan strategies to lead us into temptations. The movie we watched together last year shows his struggle with Satan. When he wrote The Morning and the Evening Prayer, he concluded the two prayers in the same way: “*For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me.*”

Our Gospel tells us that angels came and attended Jesus after He was tempted during forty days in the desert. Angels are God's helpers to do His will and to attend to God's children. We can be sure that we are not alone when we are facing temptations. If we feel alone, it is a temptation by itself; because Jesus promised to be with us always to the very end of the ages; and He promised to send His angels to take care of us. And we have the Holy Spirit in us, who dwells in us like in a temple. Let's be comforted by Jesus' victory as we are struggling. His victory is ours. Amen.

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