

Sunday: First Sunday in Lent
Date: February 21, 2021
Text: Mark 1:9-15
Title: He was tempted for our salvation

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me.

As we enter the Lenten Season, we change our focus from the revealing of Jesus in the Epiphany season, to a time of meditation and reflection. It is a dramatic change in nature. From the joy of the crowds as Jesus heals them of their illnesses and demon possessions, we transition to looking at the depravity of the world and the need for a Savior. Descending from the Mount of Transfiguration, we walk into the imposition of Ashes on Ash Wednesday. We strip away the Alleluias from our worship services, and we drape a black cloth on the cross to reflect the somber nature of the season.

The season of Lent magnifies the stark difference between Law and Gospel. Lent is a time of examining ourselves and recognizing how depraved we truly are. The Law of God bears down on us and shows us our sin. The will of God reflected in His Law is impossible for us to fully comply with. We are unable to keep the Law fully and completely. As a result, we are lost.

That would absolutely be the case if God were not a loving and gracious God. Knowing that we can not keep his precepts fully, he established a plan of salvation for us, even before he created the world. His plan of salvation, the promise of a Messiah, and the delivery of His only Son Jesus for our redemption, is the gospel that saves us from our sin.

The Law, given to Moses, as well as written on the hearts of all mankind, points us to see beyond ourselves to a divine creator. Paul tells us in Romans 2:14-16,

¹⁴For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶on that day when,

according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

The Law accuses us of our failures. As we succumb to temptation, we turn our back on God and put our wants and desires above His will. We do this every day. We are fallen creatures born with a human nature corrupted by the fall into sin by our first parents, Adam and Eve. As Paul tells us, we are without excuse for our sins. We are responsible for our failures. We cannot fall back on the idea that “the Devil made me do it” as Geraldine on the Flip Wilson Show, used to say.

As the jewel of God’s creation, man was close to his heart. To protect us from forever being locked into sin and depravity, he cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden to prevent them from eating of the tree of eternal life. As they struggled with life in a corrupted creation, they looked to God to fulfill his promise of a Savior.

In Jesus, the promised Savior took on human flesh and dwelled among us. God’s only Son became our brother in human flesh in the incarnation. Born of the Virgin Mary he is true man and true God. He did this to fulfill the demands of the Law as a blood sacrifice was required to atone for the rejection of the Law. To pay the price for disobedience, the Levitical Code provided for animal sacrifices which were a preview of the full and final sacrifice of the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

For the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to be effective for us, we must have faith in the person and work of Jesus. His life, death, resurrection, and ascension are the means by which our salvation has been accomplished. Through these we are redeemed and restored to a right relationship with God. We are given peace with God.

All people struggle with the Law. No one can keep the law perfectly. We all fail. And as Paul tells us, if we fail in one part of the Law we are guilty of all the Law. We need Jesus to forgive us and restore us.

During the season of Lent, we reflect on our inability to be fully obedient to God. Our sins, great and small, create a rift in our relationship with God. Our sins of commission, our active disobedience, and our sins of omission, our disobedient inaction, cling to us. We are unable to act as we should at all times and in all places.

Lent is the time for us to take stock of our condition. It is the time for us to examine our hearts and repent. Repentance, the turning away from the things that we have done that are sinful. Turning away from our selfish desires and turning back to God. Asking for forgiveness and seeking his help to change our sinful ways.

Had Jesus not taken human flesh, we would be lost in our efforts to repent and get right with God. Jesus' sinless life enabled him to be the atoning sacrifice that paid the price for all the sins of the world. In addition, it gave Jesus the authority to be the mediator between us and God the Father. He is the Great High Priest who intercedes on our behalf, pleading with the Father to forgive us for his sake.

Jesus lived a life, just like yours and mine, except he did so without sinning. In our Gospel reading today,

And when [Jesus] came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.

Forty days in the wilderness, being tempted by Satan. To get a better feel for this statement, we look at what is meant by "being tempted." Our English translations of the Bible tend to understate the temptation Jesus faced. In fact, as we read the other Gospel accounts of Jesus' time in the wilderness, it is possible to get the impression that he only faced three trials. But this could not be further from the truth. A more complete understanding of Jesus' temptations is reflected by a more literal translation of the Greek, which conveys a meaning of being continuously tempted.

Recently I saw an advertisement on television for a car. In the commercial the a family of 4 is driving to their getaway destination. The kids in the backseat are tired and antsy. The litany of "are we there yet?" begins. Soon they arrive at their destination and exit the car as fast as possible. The father asks his wife if she is getting out, to which she replies. She needs some time to herself.

This ad reminds me of road trips as a child and as a parent. The constant commentary from the back seat relating to being bored, questions about how much longer, and are we there yet, plus complaints of a sibling touching or looking at the

other, can seriously grate on the nerves of the driver and other passengers. The relentless expressions from the passengers often led to angry responses or efforts to give in and make the journey more palatable.

Now think of this in light of relentless, ongoing, continuous efforts by the evil one to lure Jesus into sin. Not just a few hours of children whining, but days, weeks, over a month, of non-stop temptation. Not just three tries, but hundreds if not thousands of attempts to lead Jesus into abandoning his role as Savior. Not just a one time effort to lure him to turn from God and worship him. Not just an effort lure Jesus to satisfy his hunger. Not just a ploy to put God to the test regarding his physical well-being. The temptations of Satan ran the gamut. From A to Z, everything was thrown at Jesus; everything that the Law forbade. Satan attempted to lure Jesus to indulge in idolatry, defiance, abusing the name of God, rejecting authority, murder and hate, adultery and lust, stealing, false witness and lying, and coveting. All these and so many more. All the things you and I struggle with. Jesus was hit with as well.

If you look at the picture on the cover of our bulletin today, we see Jesus appearing to be tired and beaten down. The temptation of Satan was draining his reserves. He is in need of rest. Jesus is bearing the sins of the whole world. He carries your sins and mine. He knew the temptations we failed to resist. The burden is overwhelmingly heavy. He is in need of care from the angels who were tending to him. He is in need of divine strength to resist the relentless onslaught.

Throughout the ordeal, Jesus remained faithful to God the Father, and the plan of salvation. He knew the ultimate destination for him on this earth was a cross at Calvary. He knew that he would be rejected by those he came to redeem. He knew that his sacrifice would not be appreciated by many. But he held fast to the road laid out before him. He resisted all the temptations that you and I miserably fail at resisting.

Jesus understands how difficult it is to resist the temptations of the devil. He lived it! He succeeded where we fail. Yet he does not hold our sins against us. He paid the price for them. He freely gives to us his righteousness in the forgiveness of ours sins. In repentance, we come before the Son of God pleading for forgiveness and he gives it to us. He then goes to the Father and lifts us up before Him. He clothes us in the robe of His righteousness. He presents us to God as reconciled children and heirs of the kingdom.

This understanding gives greater relevance to what the author of the Book of Hebrews says,

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Jesus, the Great High Priest, is who Paul speaks of in 1 Timothy 2:5-6, saying

⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. ((1 Timothy 2:5-6).

In this season of Lent we are called to examine our hearts, recognizing our failures as humans. We look at the stain of sin that clings to us. We recognize that we fall prey to the temptations of Satan. Often the same temptation trips us up over and over again. When the Law of God is held up to us, we realize how depraved we really are.

This should lead us to despair at our condition. We should be looking to God for help. It is here that God shows us his Gospel of love for his children. It is here that the message of hope and salvation in Christ Jesus washes over us and restores us. It is here that we see the work of salvation done for you and for me. Christ came for sinners. He resisted the temptations of the devil for you and for me. He walked out of the wilderness after 40 days, fully committed to redeeming all mankind. He walked forward toward the cross for you and for me.

Our sadness and despair at sin in our lives, is a good thing as we examine ourselves this Lententide. It gives us fuel for our meditation. Meditation that looks to the cross and the empty tomb of Easter. We travel the dark Lenten road of reflection and repentance, always with our eyes on the cross. The place where Jesus is lifted up in glory for the salvation of the whole world.

Amen.