

I.N.I.

First Sunday in Lent
March 5, 2017
Mark 1:12-15

In Christ Jesus, who battled Satan throughout His life and won, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Satan began his temptation of Eve with a lie and ever since then he is the “father of lies.” We human beings so easily fall for lies. Lies we make up, lies that are told to us, or lies we want to believe about ourselves. Satan is the master at telling lies. In fact he uses three powerful weapons on mankind: **LIES, DECEIT, and ACCUSATION**. Weapons that we puny humans cannot fight against on our own.

Jesus began His ministry even as He ended it, in open warfare with this ruler of this world, Satan. Christ's purpose for coming into this world was to **DESTROY THE DEVIL'S WORK,...TO DESTROY HIM WHO HAD POWER OF DEATH,...TO BIND THE STRONG MAN AND PLUNDER HIS GOODS**. Jesus did not hesitate to fight against the power of the evil one on behalf of mankind and we see that in our sermon text this morning.

Most of us are familiar with the expanded accounts of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness as recorded in both Matthew and Luke. Both of these Gospel writers included three of the temptations—

1. to change stones into bread (a temptation to use His Godly powers for a selfish purpose),
2. to jump from the temple peak (a temptation to prove God's power by testing God),
3. to bow down to Satan (a temptation to give the honor and worship due only to God to Satan).

Both Matthew and Luke give us the very words that were said by both Jesus and Satan and we see how masterfully Jesus used the Word as His defense against the "father of lies."

In contrast to those accounts, our text from Mark is concise and stark. In his one sentence summary of those 40 days of temptation you get the feel of the intense one-on-one struggle that went on between the King of kings and the ruler of this world, between the Light of the world and the prince of darkness. There is a sense of loneliness and desolation in Mark's brief report. He also gives us a detail that the other writers do not. That Jesus was out in the wilderness with only the wild beasts. Very appropriate as He fought **THE** wild beast, **THE** roaring lion who seeks men's souls.

Our text begins with the words, **AND IMMEDIATELY...** This was right after His baptism. Immediately after confirming Himself as the Messiah, the Chosen One of God who had come to take our place, the God/Man goes off to war as our Substitute. He went out according to God's will to battle. Our text says, **THE SPIRIT DROVE HIM INTO THE WILDERNESS**. The word **DROVE** is a very strong term, used when Jesus **CAST OUT or DROVE OUT** demons. The force of the word here does not mean that Jesus was unwilling to go and had to be driven by the Spirit, but that Jesus was **FILLED BY THE SPIRIT** to do His will as we are told in Luke's account. Jesus was cut off from all human contact and support in order to fight this battle on His own for all of mankind.

In isolation and among the desolation of the wilderness Jesus was engaged in all out warfare. The temptation by Satan was continuous and ongoing throughout all the 40 days. During this time as Jesus wrestled spiritually with the devil He was fasting. Therefore as the days and weeks went on Jesus was in a more weakened state physically. He was facing the great deceiver, one who could quote the Bible with ease, and at the same time fight with the fierceness of a cornered animal. This was like hand-to-hand combat. We should not think that this battle was relatively easy for Jesus, because He could not possibly sin. As a man He could suffer hunger and thirst, He knew what power and wealth was all about, and therefore He felt the real pressures of these temptations. Nor was it easy for Jesus to defeat Satan because He was the Son of God. Remember Jesus did not use His Godly powers for Himself, but in service to others. He faced temptation in the same way that you and I must face it--with the Word of God.

As Matthew and Luke report Jesus said, **IT IS WRITTEN!** and quoted God's Word as His defense. As we sing in Luther's powerful Reformation hymn A Mighty Fortress, **ONE LITTLE WORD CAN FELL HIM**.

If Jesus had sinned, just one time, Satan would have won for all time. If Jesus would have had one sinful thought, said one sinful word or committed one sinful act, all sinners would have been eternally damned with no hope. But Jesus **WON!** And when He won the battle He was completely exhausted. Matthew and Mark report that angels came and ministered to Jesus. The angels brought to Jesus the nourishment and the companionship that He had not had for 40 days.

This of course was not the end of Satan's attacks on Jesus. In Luke we are told that Satan left Jesus **UNTIL AN OPPORTUNE TIME**. We never again hear of another head-to-head encounter like this one in the wilderness, but throughout His life Satan attacked Jesus in both bold and subtle ways, with both friends and foes alike. During this Lenten season we hear of how Jesus' dear friend and disciple Peter denied even knowing Him. This must have been a real blow to Jesus and a temptation to get angry with Peter and get rid of that weak, cowardly follower. We will also hear of how another of His disciples, Judas, betrayed Jesus into the hands of His enemies for 30 pieces of silver. But through it all Jesus remained sinless and perfect though **TEMPTED IN EVERY WAY, JUST AS WE ARE**. He did what Adam and Eve and you and I and everyone else could not do--live a perfect life in thought, word and deed--and He did it for Adam and Eve and you and I and everyone else.

HE DEFEATED SATAN FOR US!

In the last two verses of our text Mark directs our attention to the heart and core of the message that Jesus proclaimed. We read: **NOW AFTER JOHN WAS PUT IN PRISON, JESUS CAME TO GALILEE, PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND SAYING, THE TIME IS FULFILLED, AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND. REPENT, AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL.**

Together with Christ's defeat of Satan (by His perfect life of obedience and His sacrificial death on the cross), these words explain for us the essence of Jesus' mission here on earth: the defeat of Satan and the preaching of the Gospel. There is an urgency in Jesus' words. Literally the Greek has the perfect tense of the verb and it is written first which means a greater emphasis. Literally it reads: **FULFILLED IS THE TIME**. God's own time, the fullness of time had now come. Thousands of years of prophecies were now coming to a fulfillment. The centuries of longing and looking, of waiting and watching had now come to an end. The Messiah is here in the person of Jesus.

The next line is in the same Greek form, literally reading: **AT HAND (NEAR) IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD**. Now we know that God's kingdom is not of space, not of this world. What does Jesus mean then, that it is at hand? He means that God's gracious rule of love in the hearts and lives of His believing children is close by. It is as close and near as Jesus Himself. It is standing there right in front of the people. It is the rule of God in the hearts of His people through Christ and His powerful Word.

What needs to be done? The Word must work in the heart. Jesus simplifies and summarizes it. **REPENT!** Be led to a Godly sorrow over your sins. Through the Spirit's use of the Law we have a broken and a contrite heart that acknowledges with grief that we have dared to break God's commands. Then through the Spirit's use of the Gospel-- **BELIEVE**, believe in the Good News of a Savior who has come to take our place and live for us and die for us. This news is too good to be true to natural man. It can only be believed through the power of the Spirit on our hearts.

The term **BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL** is unique. Nowhere else in Scripture is it found in this way. What Jesus is saying is that the child of God is not just merely to be aware of or to acknowledge the Gospel, so that he knows **OF** the Good News of Jesus, but that he believes **IN** that Good News for his salvation. He trusts the fact that Jesus lived and died and rose for him. It does no good to know about the Gospel, we must believe **IN** the Gospel, believe **IN** the Good News of a Savior come to live for us and to die for us and rise again.

Jesus' action and words spell out clearly His mission and His message. Yet many today miss the point of Jesus' life. To many people, Jesus is just a good man, a great healer, a perfect example to follow, a famous prophet and religious leader, on the par with Moses, Mohammed and Gandhi. If they believe that, then the Christ they preach is an empty shell, a false Christ whom they use to endorse political causes, whom they use to seek peace on earth and to foster work-righteous attitudes. That kind of Jesus can save no one and doesn't really exist.

Do we **UNDERSTAND THE POINT OF JESUS' LIFE?** Every human being is responsible

for his own struggle with the devil. He needs to defeat Satan and obey God perfectly. On our own we have lost that fight before we were born, as soon as we were conceived. But Jesus fought and won the battle for us. He lived for us and He died instead of us. He is our Substitute. His innocent shed blood paid the penalty of our sins and His resurrection crushed Satan's authority over us for all time. His death and resurrection victory means our sins are forgiven forever, everlasting life is ours, we have peace with God and salvation is assured.

Because Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are every day, He understands the loneliness and the futility of our struggle with Satan and sin. The author to the Hebrews writes, **THEREFORE, IN ALL THINGS HE HAD TO BE MADE LIKE HIS BRETHREN, THAT HE MIGHT BE A MERCIFUL AND FAITHFUL HIGH PRIEST IN THINGS PERTAINING TO GOD, TO MAKE ATONEMENT FOR THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE. FOR IN THAT HE HIMSELF SUFFERED, BEING TEMPTED, HE IS ABLE TO AID THOSE WHO ARE TEMPTED.**

Jesus and His Word is also our strength through faith to resist the devil's temptations. We are not helpless wimps doomed to fall for every temptation that comes our way. We are not Satan's toys to be played with in whatever way he desires; dupes to fall for every trick and trap Satan lays before us. We are **MORE THAN CONQUERORS THROUGH HIM WHO LOVED US. We CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS US.**

Once we understand the **POINT OF JESUS' LIFE** through faith we will be led to an understanding of a Christian's life here on earth--to resist Satan through His Word and then gratefully praise God by keeping His law and telling others about God's Good News in Christ.

That's the point of your life and mine. Paul writes in II Cor. 5:14-15: **FOR THE LOVE OF CHRIST CONSTRAINS US, BECAUSE WE JUDGE THUS: THAT IF ONE DIED FOR ALL, THEN ALL DIED; AND HE DIED FOR ALL, THAT THOSE WHO LIVE SHOULD LIVE NO LONGER FOR THEMSELVES, BUT FOR HIM WHO DIED FOR THEM AND ROSE AGAIN.**

May the Holy Spirit lead us to see in Christ and His Word our victory over Satan and by the power of that Word have the ability to withstand his attacks and to live for Christ.
Amen.