

Pastor Jon's Sermon from 2/29 and 3/1

Text: Matthew 4:1-11

“Overcoming Temptations”

Today's theme in our scriptures for this first weekend in Lent is temptation. We all know the power of temptation. And Lent is the season in the church that we name what tempts us and battle against it through prayer, fasting, confession, and acts of love.

I was at a new-to-the-area ELCA rostered leader's event on Thursday at the Synod office in Appleton. We were dwelling in the word... in particular our Gospel for today about Jesus' temptations in Matthew 4. As we went around the room, I heard a parent confess her temptation that in order to get down time she hands her child a phone or tablet. I felt convicted when she said this. Because I do this with our three year-old. It is too easy to hand over the electronics as a babysitter. Since then, I have been more intentional about spending time playing with her. I took her swimming at the Y over the weekend. She would rather do that.

Whether it is the serpent in Genesis or the devil in Matthew, the forces of evil are bent on destroying humans by tempting them or testing them to disavow God and think that the world and their current life isn't good enough.

The Greek word for devil in our Gospel for today is diabolos. Diabolos can be defined as accuser, adversary, or opponent. “You did this, and you liked it, and you will do it again if you have the chance.” It is where we get the word diabolical. To be diabolically opposed to something means to be completely opposite. The devil is completely opposite to God and God's plan for the world. The devil wants nothing more than to keep you from the faith.

In our Gospel for today, the devil is personified to some extent... no horns or pitchfork though. He (it is a male noun) has a conversation with Jesus in the wilderness after Jesus' baptism.

Notice how the devil attacks when Jesus is alone and in the wilderness. Jesus was isolated from family and friends. He just

fasted for 40 days and 40 nights and was famished. The wilderness in the Bible wasn't lush and green. It was barren and dry.

So, the first temptation of Jesus attacks his hunger. The tempter starts by questioning Jesus' identity as the Son of God. "If you are the Son of God... command these stones to become loaves of bread." In other words, use your power to make bread to feed yourself. But Jesus counters with scripture from Deuteronomy. It is written. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

In the second temptation, the devil takes Jesus to the high point of the temple in Jerusalem and tempts Jesus to throw himself off of a cliff. Here the tempter uses scripture, in particular Psalm 91, which inspired the song *Eagle's Wings*, to try to get Jesus to jump off so the angels could rescue Jesus on the way down that won't dash his foot against a stone. There would be an audience there. Jesus would get much public recognition and more followers. Jesus rejects the challenge and counters with scripture, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

In the third temptation, the Devil tries to get Jesus to question his identity and that his life isn't good enough as is. The devil makes a false promise on a high mountain. "I will give you ownership of all the kingdoms of the world if you would fall down and worship only me." The temptation was power and glory. Again, Jesus counters with scripture.

Jesus overcame all the temptations with God's Word. I feel this is one of the takeaways of this text for us today. God's word can give you life, hope, and strength. But Jesus also isn't passive here. He actively battles and argues with the devil. He doesn't just give in to the temptations, which I think we humans too easily do. He battles them.

The devil was essentially saying, "Jesus, what you have, your life, your identity as the Son of God isn't good enough."

Do you believe you are good enough? Or do you question your worth? Do you trust that you already are beautiful and precious in God's sight? Or do the pressures of the world make you question

your life? I feel we live in a world today that constantly bombards us with messages that we aren't good enough.

And what is countering that message in your life? Jesus knew the scriptures from his studies and his childhood. He grew up in the Jewish faith and inwardly digested the scriptures to help him in times of testing. Of course, he was God, but he also was fully human. He knew real temptation. The word of God can help us counter the constant attacks by the tempter.

The good news for us is found in our baptism in Jesus. In our baptism service, we renounce the forces of evil 3 times. Jesus has ultimate power over the devil. Luther said in the Small Catechism that through our baptism we are promised protection from sin, death and the devil. Those things will not and cannot define us. Our baptism in Christ is our true identity. With the power Jesus battled temptation, we are assured of his presence as we battle temptations through our baptism.

Amen