

25 February 2007
Lent 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A Mighty Fortress”

Text: Luke 4:1-13 (Romans 10:8b-13)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The First Sunday in Lent is traditionally set aside to remember the temptation of Jesus. When fresh off His baptism in the Jordan River, and the voice from Heaven that said, “*You are my beloved Son,*” (Lk 3:22) the Spirit leads Jesus out into the wilderness to fast and pray for forty days and forty nights. Not as punishment, but as a time of preparation for his public ministry; for the work He was about to begin. And while Jesus is out there, alone and hungry, Satan decides to take advantage of this opportunity. And so comes to Jesus and tempts Him to sin.

Now, whenever I’ve read this story (and maybe you’re like me) – I’ve always pictured the devil coming to Jesus in a very *confrontational* way. *If . . . you are the Son of God,* Satan says. Challenging the assertion. Trying to get Jesus to prove it. Trying to get Jesus to *doubt* it. *If you are the Son of God,* your Father wouldn’t be treating you this way. It can’t possibly be true.

And I guess I’ve always thought of it that way for Satan confronts us that way too, doesn’t he? Especially when difficulties come. When struggles and suffering come. When trial and uncertainty and darkness is all that seems ahead for us. Sometimes we get that little, nagging, doubting voice in our heads, don’t we? *You think you’re a child of God?* Really! Would a heavenly Father treat His child this way? Wouldn’t He make sure this stuff *doesn’t* happen to you? Really, isn’t this proof that you’re not who you think you are? Don’t believe it! You’ve been duped.

So I think that’s part of it. And I think those thoughts have caused a lot of people to doubt and fall away. But I also think there’s more to it than that. For Jesus in this story, and for us. For I don’t think Satan puts all his eggs in one basket. And

there's *another* way he comes to us and tempts us. *Another* way he gets under our skin and into our minds. *Another* way he gets us to listen and lead us astray. And if he does it to us, then he also did it to Jesus, who (we are told) *was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.* (Heb 4:15) And that other way is not by coming to us and *confronting* us, by coming to us and **looking like our best friend.**

And so imagine it like that, that day in the wilderness. . . . Jesus, listen – I'm not the enemy at all! I'm your friend. And (as it looks now) *your only friend!* I'm here to help. To make things easier. For you're the Son of God, right? *And if you're the Son of God, why are you hungry?* Just make some food for yourself. That's not hard for you! What's the harm in that? Your Father would understand. . . .

And if you've come for the kingdoms of the world – look, let's stop this! I'll just give 'em to you. If you just acknowledge that they're mine, I'll let you have 'em! We don't have to be on opposite sides, you know. Why can't we just get along? . . .

And speaking of that, why are you out here all by yourself? This is no place and no way to get people to follow you! Look, I know these people. Let me help you out. I've got a plan! Show the people who you are – you know, your power and glory! Throw yourself off the Temple. You won't get hurt. For you're the Son of God, right? *And if you're the Son of God, then you got angels all around to help you.* Hey, they'll add to the show! . . . Won't that be better than this?

A better way than God's way. Isn't that how Satan convinced Adam and Eve? Isn't that how he got to the children of Israel? And isn't that how he gets us too? . . . Look, I'm here to help! Really! There's more than one wisdom. There's more than one truth. There's more than one way. Your Father will understand. It's not that bad. If it feels good it can't be wrong. Can't we just get along? Just do what comes naturally. Everyone's doing it. Times have changed. . . .

And we fall for it, don't we? I know I do! I *wish* I could say I was like Jesus. Who resisted the confrontation. Who resisted the "best friend" act. Who put down the lies and false promises of Satan with the Word of God. Seeing through his tricks and sending him packing. And trusting His Father. No matter what. Even when it didn't look good. Even in the wilderness. Even on the cross!

Sometimes I do that. Mostly I don't. I know I should, but I find that I can't. (Rom 7)
I am too weak. I am too sinful. I want to be like Jesus. I do! You too, I know.
Fresh off our baptisms, fresh out of Church and absolution . . . But we are not.

And so it's important today to see Jesus here not as our *example* – in how to do battle against the devil and win! To buck us up and get us to try harder next time. No! But to see Him here as our **Saviour** – the One who did do battle against the devil, for us who are weak and sinful; for us in our place – **and won!** Jesus is not showing us how to fight, **but fighting for us!** One on one. A new Adam, against the same old enemy. Or as Luther wrote, and as we just sang: “*But for us fights the Valiant One, whom God Himself elected.*” (LSB #656 v 2)

And He took it all. Luke slipped that in there at the end: *When the devil had ended every temptation.* Not just these three, but *every* temptation. A much greater weight than we will ever feel! For we usually cave long before we feel *even half* the devil's force and weight of craft and temptation. But Jesus felt it all – its full and cumulative weight pressing down hard. Here in the wilderness, and on the cross – when “*the opportune time*” came for Satan again. When on the cross not just one sin, or one person's sin, or one nation's sin, or all believers' sins, but every sin from the beginning of the world already committed, and every sin unto the end of the world yet to be committed – were laid upon Him. And that familiar voice returned: *if you are the Son of God . . .* Challenging Him. Befriending Him. There's a better way . . . an easier way . . . I'm here to help, Jesus!

But Jesus stayed, in the wilderness, and on the cross. To atone for your sin. And what looked like defeat in His death, turned out to be triumph in His resurrection.

And that victory is our victory too! The victory we could never accomplish on our own, but now ours by grace through faith. Now ours as we are baptized into Jesus' triumphant death and resurrection. Now ours as we eat His body and drink His blood. Ours, for we are not on our own, but now we live in Him and He is us. And so His life is my life. And yours. For all He did He did for you. His birth, His circumcision, His life. His temptation, His obedience, his faith. His suffering, His death, His burial, His resurrection, His ascension. All yours. All given to you when you hear those wonderful words: **I forgive you all your sins.**

For forgiveness is not getting off the hook. Forgiveness is getting a new life. The life of Christ, given to you. The life of Christ that will never end. *Because*, as St. Paul wrote, *if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. You will be saved from the devil, from your sin, from yourself. You will be saved, not because of what you did, because you said the right words – but because of what Jesus did for you. You will be saved, for you have a Saviour. Who fought for you, and won!*

Satan will make you try to forget that, and rely on yourself. He'll make you try to doubt it, and think yourself unworthy. He'll try to make you think *he's* your best friend and has a better way. And he will not give up. And so Jesus taught us to pray: **And lead us not into temptation.** And what do we mean when we pray this? Father, rescue me, for only you can. Don't leave me on my own! Send Your Spirit to guard and keep me. Your Spirit, to lead me to Christ and keep me in Christ. In Christ, where I am safe. In Christ, where is my life and victory. In His flesh and blood – in the wilderness, on the cross, and on the altar. *That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.* (Small Catechism, explanation to the Second Article)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, do not underestimate the enemy. But also remember who won. For that is the message this day. That against the devil and all his works and all his ways, we have A Mighty Fortress. *A Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.* (Lk 2:11)

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.