

10 March 2019  
Lent 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“It’s Personal”

Text: Luke 4:1-13; Romans 10:8b-13

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

Jesus takes temptation personally. It hurts Him, for sin hurts His creation. Sin destroys what He has created. Sin twists what He has made straight. Sin corrupts what He has made pure. Sin hurts you. Temptation is not just an attack against you, but against Him. So Jesus takes temptation personally.

Which is why Jesus takes temptation personally - in His person, in the flesh, for you. He came in the flesh to be personally tempted, and to win. To take all the temptation satan could dish out, and not fall for the lies, the deceit, the make-it-sound-good, all that we fall for. He came to live the perfect life that we cannot live. Jesus came to take temptation personally.

And so Jesus took temptation personally. *From* a person, if you will. Not a human being, but person in the same sense that we use that word of the three persons of the Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; three persons yet one God. Person as *that which subsists of itself* (cf. Augsburg Confession, Article 1). The person, the tempter, in that sense is satan, as we heard in the Holy Gospel today. Satan, the devil, a fallen angel, prince of demons, enemy of God and all that belong to God. Jesus took temptation personally.

Which is important, because I think we tend to regard temptation as just a feeling, an urge, an inclination to do something. And it is that. The sin that we’re born with, the sin that we inherited from our parents, the sin that has so thoroughly corrupted us, inclining us to sin.

But it’s *more* than that, because Jesus - not born in the usual way, from the union of a human father and mother, but conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary (as we confess in the Creed), wasn’t born with sin. And so His temptation didn’t come from within, but from outside of Him. From another. A person. Luring Him, calling Him, seducing Him, trying to pull Him away from His Father and so destroy Him.

Jesus’ temptation was personal. It wasn’t just something in the world, some kind of power or force. It was person-to-person. Mano-a-mano. A very real battle for the life of Jesus and the life of the world.

Jesus took temptation personally, **and so do you**. So you should think of temptation. That’s

it's not just an urge or a feeling, but that there is a person behind it - a fallen angel and his menacing mob, seducing you, luring you, calling you, tempting you to stray from your Lord, or turn away from your Lord and join them. Seducing you, luring you, calling you to think that God doesn't really care about you; isn't really here for you or helping you. Seducing you, luring you, tempting you not to life, or more life, or a fuller life, but to death. Because this one, tempting you, no matter what he says or wants you to believe, does not have your best interest in mind, only his best interest. It's personal.

Now, those in our world, those who don't believe, those who "know better," will smirk at this and shake their heads. They'll regard us like children who think there's a monster in the closet or under their bed. They'll pat us on the head and think us silly, superstitious, old fashioned, juvenile, stuck in the past, medieval, unenlightened. *Oh you silly Christians! We're beyond that. That's not how smart, enlightened, intelligent people think.* Run along now, while we do the grown up stuff.

Well, given the state of our world today and all that is passing for "knowledge" and "progress" these days, I'm not particularly worried about what they think here. Or that it's certainly anything that should cause me to doubt. But it is, in fact, quite dangerous. For it gives the devil more room to work, and more opportunity to cause his mischief. Which he certainly is.

Because as we heard today, temptation is personal. Jesus took it personally. The devil came to him personally and tempted him personally, with temptations designed just for Jesus, personally.

But how different Jesus from satan. For while the devil has only *his own* best interest in mind, Jesus has only YOUR best interest in mind. If Jesus had been concerned about Himself, or thinking about Himself (as satan does), He could have done what the devil suggested - and taken care of Himself and advanced His agenda in this most worldly of ways. But this is not how Jesus is. He is the very opposite of satan, of course. And so fends off the attacks. He will not serve Himself. He will not think of Himself. He will not save Himself. For He came to serve, think of, and save YOU.

And so Jesus fends off the attacks of satan, but not by using His divine power, strength, knowledge, and skill, but using the Word of God. Which, to our thinking, might seem a little like bringing a knife to a gun fight, against the strong and powerful temptations being hurled at us by satan and his mob. But it is much more than that. For the Word of God is personal, too. The Word of God became flesh. And the Word of God is no dead letter, or just a or manual to teach you how to fight - but is, in fact, a Spirit-filled Word. A Word filled with the Spirit of God and His power. The Word of God is a weapon, a two-edged sword, we are told (Hebrews 4:12). And this too: *it is the power of God for salvation* (Romans 1:16), for saving.

And so against the temptations personally designed for Him, Jesus hurls the Word of God. For the Word is meant to be spoken. The reading from Romans today connected believing

and speaking. Words are powerful, but the Word of God even more so. Words are powerful. That's why wives want their husbands to say "I love you," not just act that way. Words incite and make peace. And God's Word creates. It does what it says. The Word creating all things in the beginning. The Word proclaiming - and giving! - the forgiveness of sins. The Word becoming flesh and dying for you on the cross. God's Word is, in fact, the most powerful weapon we have.

That's why Luther would say that when you pray, don't just pray in your thoughts, pray out loud so the devil can hear you! Hurl your prayers against him and his temptations. Don't be shy about it! For if temptation is personal, use the Word like a sword, like you're in a fencing contest. Thrust God's Word against Satan. Trust its power, not your own.

Which is what Jesus did. When the devil tempted Him to take what He had not been given, to jump into some risky behaviour and test His Father, to love the gift more than the Giver, or to think of Himself - for, after all, what could be so wrong with that? - Jesus wouldn't bite (*yes, pun intended!*). Even when the devil tried to use the Word of God against Him - against its own author! - Jesus could see through the lies and deception, and stood firm. Not just to show us how to do it, but to win the battle that we couldn't win. The battle that began at the Jordan with His baptism, took Him to the wilderness, and then ultimately to the cross.

And note: what did Jesus do there, on the cross? There too, He spoke God's Word. Hurling it in whispers against those who shouted insults at Him, and shouting it against death when death would try to silence Him. And how delighted the devil must have been when Jesus breathed His last; when the Word of God made flesh finally shut up. When he, the great devil, made Him shut up. His defeat in the wilderness but now a distant memory.

Until, of course, the empty tomb and the angel there announced quite a different verdict! That the Word of God was living and active (Hebrews 4:12), risen from the dead, never to die again. The Law had been fulfilled by Him, our sin had been atoned for by Him, and death had been defeated by Him. Jesus fought for us and won.

And the victory won at the cross and empty tomb, is the victory He keeps on giving, here, in His Word, as His Word continues to win, washing away sin, proclaiming forgiveness, giving new life, and feeding us the victorious Body and Blood of Jesus. The same voice that hurled the Word in the wilderness, now speaking forgiveness and peace to you. And the same Body and Blood attacked in the wilderness, now given to strengthen you. And the same Jesus who gave Himself for you, giving Himself to you.

And don't think the devil doesn't see that. He does, and Jesus in you is like a red flag to a bull. Expect to be attacked. Expect to be tempted. Expect to be gored. But when you are, you have the healing medicine of the Word of God. The balm of His forgiveness for when you are burned, for when you bite and fall into sin. Bite this, Jesus says of His Body and Blood, and live. You, personally. Him personally.

Because it is personal. We sang it in the opening hymn:

*Rise! To Arms! With prayer employ you,  
O Christians, lest the foe destroy you;  
For satan has designed your fall* (LSB #668 v. 1).

But at the end, today, we'll sing this too:

*But for us fights the valiant One,  
Whom God Himself elected.  
Ask ye, Who is this?  
Jesus Christ it is* (LSB #656 v. 2)!

It is personal. For God doesn't just love the world, He loves you, personally. And so He sent His Son for you, personally. That when satan, personally, attacks you, personally, you have hope. For you, personally, have a Saviour, who fought for you, personally, and won.

So next time you're tempted (and that won't be long from now!), take it personally! Because it is. Be offended at the attack! Know the person behind it and how he wants to destroy you, not help you. And then remember the One who came, personally, for you. To help you, fight for you, save you, and provide life **for you**. For you. *Personally*.

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.

*(This idea of taking temptation personally inspired by the book Tempted and Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ by Russell Moore.)*