

The texts for today set forth either the core truth of life or a fairy tale. They reveal either the framework for your daily struggles or a fanciful ancient legend. Did sin and death come upon all men through Adam's sin? Did Jesus defeat Satan? Does Jesus obedience and righteousness lead to justification and life for all men – for you – for your children – for your neighbors? From ancient times Christ's church has heard this text on this Sunday. Do you sense its importance for you today?

Two battles are set forth with the same combatants – man and Satan. The first Adam coveted God's place and lost His place (the image of God). The second Adam is God who humbled Himself to take man's place to restore that image. The first Adam rebelled in paradise. The second Adam obeyed in a barren wilderness. The first Adam had no hunger, but in a power play grabbed for food he had not been given. The second Adam had a forty day hunger, but refused a power play to grab for food He had not been given.

That's where Satan struck first – the stomach. He found our Lord alone and hungry in the desert. He finds you and yours hungry as well. That is why you want to eat too much or too little or too carelessly or too refined. That is why you get bored. That is why you repeat mistakes. That is why you crave forbidden things. That is why you do not pray as you ought! That is why you grumble. Satan attacks your stomach, your body, your desires and tempts you to serve yourself just as he also tempts me.

Satan tempted Jesus to break the fast but our Savior answered from Scripture, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God". Oh to live by every word that God speaks! If we did that in daily prayer at home, how much richer weekly worship would be! If we did that in perfect trust how completely doubt and anxiety and greed and pride and fear and hate would melt away!

Satan next sounded like a reasonably good Lutheran – encouraging a trust in God's promises. Again he began where the Father had ended. As Jesus shouldered our sin at His baptism, the Father proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." The slanderer, the tempter, the adversary, piggy backed smoothly onto this Word of God - If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written...

Here Satan tempted Jesus to be a power God and a prove-it-by-miracle Man of faith. If you trust God enough, He will confirm it with a miracle. Scripture isn't enough for you Jesus so let's put together something really special and super-spiritual. You need an extraordinary event that will guarantee what God has promised. The flesh always wants proof. Until the day Christ returns, there will be voices outside of us and inside of us that tantalize and say that some experience makes what God has said more certain and more sure. There is a great trend to find God and achieve faith through miracles, visions, and extraordinary spiritual experiences. But He constantly pointed people back to Scripture Alone.

As always, the father of lies twisted Scripture with his second temptation. Testing God is not the same as trusting Him. Our Savior answered "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Jesus, the Man of faith, needed no miracle to convince Himself of God's care and knew that God's care does not permit us to bind God with our desires. Jesus trusted the Father's Word to Him in baptism, demanding no further proof.

Notice how Satan's temptations always promise to take us up higher? "You will be like God, knowing good and evil," he promised Eve. Yet the depths to which our first parents fell still darken our lives today. You can go higher by rebelling against your parents he promises children. All of you can go higher if you set aside God's commandments concerning your bodies and your possessions and your tongues and your hearts. He also led Jesus higher and higher – from the wilderness – to the pinnacle of the temple – and finally to a very high mountain. In addition he amplifies the promised pay-off in his third temptation. More than just relief from hunger, more than a show of Fatherly care, Satan now offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

No careful nuances here! No veiled compassion or pseudo concern for God's Word. Now its all or nothing! Scripture calls him "the prince of the world" and "the ruler of this age" (John 12:31/14:30/II Cor. 4:4/Eph. 2:2). He claimed to offer Jesus instant success in gaining the world without the cross. Yet he was offering Jesus the fading glory of a death-filled and cursed world to turn aside from His life-giving work of removing the curse. Satan asked for just one thing, a bodily act indicating worship. Our Savior again responded with just one thing, Scripture, always Scripture, "Be gone Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

“Be gone Satan!” And he was. Jesus’ word does exactly what it says. The devil left Him and not by choice! Fresh from His Baptism Jesus won in the wilderness for us. So too, as you are baptized, in the name of our Lord, Satan is renounced in all his works and all his ways. Everything that is wrong with us was hanging on Jesus for those forty days. Yet Jesus resisted the enticement to step away from the words of God and the way of the cross. He resisted again on Good Friday when Satan tempted through the voices of the people, “If you are the Son of God come down from the cross”.

Temptation is always temptation to break God's Word, to go against it. God says, "Do this" or "Don't do that." And the devil says, "Oh, come on now! That is not practical. You're being a prude, old-fashioned, no fun. Surely God didn't really mean it. And even if He did then it is only because He is holding out on you. What kind of a God is He, anyway? I thought He was supposed to love you." This is the way he attacked Eve in the garden. It is the way he attacked Our Lord in the desert. It is the way he attacks us here and now. Eve could not bear the assault. Adam failed to protect her. He, and she, gave in, and became children of Satan and you are the spawn of their loins. But the 2nd Adam, the perfect Adam, suffered these temptations also. And He did not fail. He overcame. He lived the perfect life of faith and with nothing more than the Word He drove the devil back.

You see, there are loads and loads of power gods, idols that promise to fill your stomach and satisfy your desires. There are loads and loads of miracle gods that offer religious knowledge and even control of God through visions or meditation or miracles or feelings or extraordinary spiritual experiences – if you have enough faith. But there is only one God of the Calvary kind! Jesus! So hidden! So human! So weak! So trusting in Scripture! So bloody! So dead and buried!

While He would not fall down in reverence to the father of lies, He did fall down in sacrificial death in obedience to His heavenly Father. While He would not tempt God by throwing Himself down in a display of reckless danger, he did trust God when the Father threw Him down in a display of God’s damning wrath. While He would not turn stones into bread to satisfy His physical hunger, he did offer up His body as the Bread of Life to satisfy our spiritual hunger.

He has won the victory for you against the evil one. But the battle will continue until the day God has set for you to die and then the judgment. As surely as you have been baptized into Christ and covered with Him, so surely will Satan tempt you in all the ways He tempted Jesus. What the devil dislikes most is faith – faith in Christ’s forgiveness - being sure of what you do not see in the humble means God has promised! His temptations are always to things that can be seen and felt and measured. He will tempt you with your weaknesses and he will tempt you with your strengths. He would have you live by logic or reason or feelings or the spirit of this age – anything but faith in God’s Word.

There are no alliterated strategies or secrets that will stop you from sinning on this side of glory, that will stop you from hurting yourself and those you love, or which will grant you sudden prosperity. Christianity is the way of weakness, substitution, and mercy. But there is an answer to temptation. I know you are eager for it. Because nothing bothers Christians more than their failing struggle against sin. Why do you keep sinning? Why don't you do what you want to do and instead do the evil you don't want? The bookstores profit from this, sending you back to yourself and some inner feeling and personal struggle and triumph. But there is no secret, complicated formula, no magic prayer. The answer is simply this: Jesus loves you. That is it. Jesus suffered for you. He has forgiven all your sins and they are not coming back. In the coming Day it will be revealed to all of creation that you are a son of God, well-pleasing to Him. What you suffer now, which is not just pain and sorrow but also temptation and failure, is not worthy of comparison to the glory that will be revealed in you. Behold, even now, you are surrounded, and ministered to, by angels. With them and with the whole company of heaven you laud and magnify His glorious Name, the Name of peace, into which you were baptized. Sin is not overcome by the Law, but by the Gospel.

The Lord Jesus has overcome temptation for you and answered for your sins. You are forgiven. You are righteous. You are Holy. “Oh come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” Amen.