

TEXT: Luke 4:1-13

THEME: STARING DOWN THE DEVIL

1. Jesus Tempted!—Really?
2. Do not Tempt
3. He Is not Finished

Dear Fellow-Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb:

I think that we all understand what temptation is. There is a story told about a little boy in a grocery store that I think illustrates the nature of temptation. The boy was standing near an open box of peanut butter cookies. “Now then, young man,” said the grocer as he approached the young man. “What are you up to?” “Nothing,” replied the boy. “Nothing! Well it looks to me like you were trying to take a cookie.” “You’re wrong, mister, I’m trying not to!” That’s temptation!

We understand that temptation leads to trouble. Such was the plight of a man that I read about in Reader’s Digest. This man said he was shopping in the mall with his wife when a shapely young woman in a short, form fitting dress walked by. He said as she walked by his eyes followed her. Without looking up from the item she was examining his wife asked, “Was it worth the trouble that you are in?” That’s the trouble with temptation.

How many of us have shrugged and said, “The devil made me do it!” and used that as an excuse when caught doing something we weren’t supposed to do? It’s a convenient defense. But there’s one problem: the devil can’t make us do anything. He may be clever, but he’s not all powerful. Yet we need to learn how to deal with the devil...how to STARE DOWN THE DEVIL. We can learn that today from our Savior Jesus.

Or can we? After all, we are mere mortals. Jesus is God. He is perfect. The assumption is made that Jesus, the sinless Son of God, had a much easier time facing temptation than we do. But is that true?

Consider this detail from our text: “**Jesus...returned from the Jordan.**” We have every indication that Jesus returned just like we would—walking or riding. He didn’t teleport, levitate, or fly. Jesus was a human being just like we are. Even though he was sinless, he still faced real temptations, not from the inside as we do but certainly from the outside, from the devil.

Accepting the Bible as entirely true means we must also accept what is stated about Jesus: He was “**tempted in every way, just as we are**” (Hebrews 4:15). When confronted by the devil’s temptations, he didn’t claim he was exempt from such troubles because he is God. No, in order to serve us fully as our one and only Savior with from sin, Jesus took our place. That included facing real temptations and overcoming them and winning the victory for us as our perfect substitute.

Jesus was tempted with tests greater than most of us normally would face. We will see that over the next few weeks of the Lenten season. But right now, today, do you see how he did it? We are told he was “**full of the Holy Spirit.**” In fact, so prominent was the Holy

Spirit in Jesus' day-to-day living that it was the Spirit that led him into the desert. That is how he faced temptation and won. He was filled and led by the Holy Spirit.

As you face temptation, lean not on your own devices, powers, or strategies, but lean on your faith and the power of the Holy Spirit that can enable you to face the greatest of temptations victoriously. This means living each moment mindful that through faith in Jesus you are a dear child of God. You have been redeemed from all sin by the blood of Jesus. You were brought to faith and are kept in saving faith by the Spirit's power, working through God's Word and Sacraments. Through faith in Christ, you are devoted to God in all you do.

So, it is easy to overcome temptation, right? You just need to stay close to God, be in his Word, receive his Sacrament—and you'll be fine. Oh, my friends, never underestimate the power of your enemy, the devil.

By the time the devil brought Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple, he had known God and his Son for thousands of years. The devil obviously spent time studying the things of the Bible. The devil can quote the Bible, as he did with Psalm 91 earlier in his temptations of Jesus. Yet the devil is evil in its purest form. He knows no respect, no dignity, and no fear. Blinded by his own darkened heart, the devil would even try to tempt God.

While this encounter is the only one between Jesus and the devil recorded in the Bible, the devil was always hard at work to undermine Jesus' ministry. If he could not tempt the Son of God, he would go after those around the Son of God. The devil's handiwork infiltrated the governing and religious orders of Jesus' day. He even got into the small circle of disciples that traveled with Jesus. The devil did all of his because he had one goal in mind: to undermine the mission that God gave his Son.

It is said that misery loves company, and the devil knew what was at stake in Jesus' successful mission. Apart from the salvation that comes through Jesus, every one of us is lost. There is no heavenly home, no mansions waiting in heaven, and no eternal bliss if there is no salvation. And there is no salvation if Jesus would not have completed his mission.

While here we have a lesson in the resolve of Jesus to stay the course for our salvation, we also have a warning. The devil does his dirty work individually but also through other means. Each time we are tempted to sin, it is the devil and his far-reaching tentacles daring us to tempt God.

That's right! Whenever we dabble in sin, we also tempt God. We may not be daring him to jump off a roof, but we are saying to God, "If your Son's sacrifice truly benefits me, then stop me from sinning!" We tempt God by flaunting sin in the face of him who sacrificed his own Son to save us from sin. We dare God to go back on his Word of forgiveness that he pronounced for all believers.

The admonition to the devil not to tempt God applies to all of us. Each sin we commit is an attempt on our part to tempt God, and that must stop. The salvation we have in Jesus is not an invitation to sin more but to live holy lives.

The story of Jesus staring down the devil reminds us that we can resist. Without miracles and other demonstrations of his divinity, Jesus withstood temptation with the same power that God has given each of us: the power of his Word. Despite all the vulnerabilities of being human, Jesus was victorious, and we can be too. But to withstand temptation, we need to be so absorbed in God's Word and in serving him that we are ever-vigilant to the temptations, always knowing the risks and always confident that through Christ we will win.

When Martin Luther was asked how he overcame the devil, he replied, "Well, when he comes knocking at the door of my heart, and asks 'Who lives here?' the dear Lord Jesus goes to the door and says, "Martin Luther used to live here, but he has moved out. Now I live here." When Christ fills our lives Satan has no entrance. Amen.

Prayer of the Church

Dear Lord Jesus, give us the faith to withstand temptation and the determination to devote every moment to pleasing you with our lives. We rejoice in the forgiveness we have through you, our Savior, and ask that you help us not to be tempters with sin in our own lives. We thank you for your work, that you showed us how to stare down the devil and that you completed your work to bring us salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life.

We humbly confess our sins to you. As we see you approaching your passion on the Way of Sorrows, revive in us a spirit of repentance and faith. Renew in us the assurance that your suffering and death have covered the multitude of our sins and that, on account of your work, we have been made sons and daughters of God.

With healing power and tender care, you have assisted your servant, Ruth Birsching, in her time of need, answering her prayers and our prayers on her behalf. As you have blessed her thus far in her healing, preventing complete loss of her hearing, we ask you to continue to be present through the days ahead that in all things your saving health may be made manifest and your healing power made known.

Receive the thanks we offer with George and Mary Herbst for the gift of life, the blessing of a new healthy grandson, Noah Herbst, to gladden heart and home. Draw the parents and sons, Matt, Sarah, Micah, and now little Noah, together with cords of love, unite them in will and purpose, and smile on them with your blessings as together they grow in your grace.

We ask this in your name, who has taught us to pray:

THE LORD'S PRAYER