

Genesis 3:1-21; (Matthew 4:1-11)

If you gave up something for Lent, then you only have six weeks to go. A man in Corning, Iowa gave up food for Lent. He drinks only water and four pints of beer a day. Usually people keep eating and may give up beer for Lent. Some give up sweets or chocolate. Some give up TV. The devil doesn't give up anything for Lent. He does not tone down his temptations during this penitential season of the church. I doubt if he steps it up during this time either, but that's only because his throttle is always set on full.

In today's readings we encounter him twice. Once in a garden...once in a desert. In the garden Satan tempts Eve, who was not hungry, who had every one of her needs and wants satisfied. In the desert he tempts Jesus, who had not eaten in forty days, who was weak, probably sleep-deprived, perhaps a little delirious. He tempts Jesus three times. All three attempts fail. With Eve he succeeds with just one temptation.

What does all of this mean for us? In our Epistle St. Paul tells us. Through the one act of disobedience, death and condemnation spread to all, for all have sinned. But through the obedience of Jesus, all are declared justified, and righteousness and life are given.

But what about for our day-to-day living...what do these true stories in the Bible teach us? Well, I could spend hours up here in the pulpit this morning explaining Genesis 3 and Matthew 4, but then you may be tempted to give up church for Lent. So let me draw your attention to one phrase in our first text and I will preach just on that. When Satan tempted Eve, where was Adam in all this? Was he off scouting, or sightseeing? Maybe golfing? No, our text says of Adam that he was right there with her. "(Eve) took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband *who was with her*, and he ate."

In these words, for us there is both bad news and good news. But we must first begin with the Law. You and I do not stand a chance against Satan. Look at our first parents. They were holy; we're not. They were not burdened with sin as we are. Their minds were not darkened as ours are. They did not have to battle against their sinful flesh as we do. There was not a world filled with sin that was pulling them away from God as there is today. Adam and Eve had everything going their way, and yet they fell...easily. What chance do we have, who have none of their advantages, but all of our disadvantages?

The reason you and I fall into temptation so quickly day after day is because we are children of Adam and Eve. As Adam was there with his wife when the devil overcame them, so were we...for what they did affected all their children. Adam still lives within us, and he will until the day we die. His weakness, his failure, his rebellion against God will always, in this life, be a part of who we are.

We were there with Eve and with Adam, in his seed, when they gave in to Satan, and that's why you and I so easily give in when the devil tempts us to disobey our parents; when he tempts us to spread gossip and lies; when he tempts us to be spiritually lazy. We show that we are the children of Adam because so often only one measly temptation is all Satan needs to succeed with us. One little thing comes up, and we stay away from the Lord's House. One little word from our neighbor, and we get angry and hold a grudge. One storm, one earthquake, one problem, and we stop trusting that God will take care of us. As easily as the tsunami wiped out homes, roads, and towns in Japan--they were overcome as if they were made of sticks--that is how easily the devil can crush us. We are nothing but a play toy in his evil hands.

We need to hear the good news...we who are the children of Adam. Jesus is the Good News, the Gospel. In the desert after the devil attempted to crush Him like a 40-foot tsunami, Jesus remained standing. Just as we have no chance against Satan, so Satan had no chance with Jesus. Our Lord had none of the comforts that Adam and Eve had. He had little, if any, physical strength remaining in His body. Yet He who is the very Word of God, threw the Word at Satan to drive him away. Jesus stood in the strength of the Word of God.

And this did not happen just that one time. Throughout His days here Jesus remained strong in the Word. He never once surrounded Himself with all that this world had to offer. He lived and breathed the Word of God. From the desert to the cross, every temptation Satan threw at Him, through friends or foes, Jesus overcame by the strength of God's Word.

Is there a lesson here for us? Is Jesus showing us by example how to stand against Satan? And I have to answer both "Yes," and "No." Yes, of course, Jesus wants us in the Word of God. Yes, God's Word alone is our defense against the devil's temptations. Those who distance themselves from the Word of Christ will be easy targets for Satan.

But also, no. More than being our example, Jesus is our Savior. He did not come to our world to show us how to defeat Satan. He defeated Satan for us because we could not. He did not teach us by example how to resist temptation. He withstood the devil's temptations for us so that we can stand with Him and in Him. Jesus did not give us the Bible as our "How-To Manual." He gave it to be our food, our medicine, God's gracious words that give us strength, that give us life and salvation. People who are dead in sin do not need an example...they need a life-giving Savior, and that is who you have, right now.

Where were you when Jesus stood up to Satan in the desert? Where were you when Jesus overcame each and every temptation as He walked throughout Judea and Galilee? Where were you when Jesus crushed the head of Satan by His own sufferings and death on the cross? Friend, just as you were right there with Adam in the garden, so you were right there with Jesus. Adam was there with his bride, Eve, in the garden, and Jesus had you, His bride the church, with Him...and He still does. Jesus, you see, did not defeat Satan for His own sake; He defeated him for you. Jesus did not become weak for any other reason than for you to have His strength now in your life. Jesus denied Himself of everything so that you are given all of God's blessings in Him.

Martin Luther puts all of this in such a comforting way. "Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us; we tremble not, we fear no ill, they shall not overpower us. This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will; he can harm us none; he's judged, the deed is done; one little word can fell him." What is that word? It's not a what; it's a who. Jesus is the Word of God. Speak that Word, yes, but to keep Satan beneath your feet, live in that Word; live in Christ.

You, the baptized sons and daughters of God, because you are in Christ and He is with you, Satan cannot harm you. Whatever temptation comes your way, Jesus has already overcome it for you. And friend, listen to this...because I know that you, like me, have fallen, have been overcome so often. Do not despair. Jesus, more than your example, is your Savior. His death for you means everything. God forgives you. Your weaknesses, your failures, your sins...He forgives all of it. Even when you fall for the same temptation over and over, you are forgiven.

And this forgiveness is always in Christ Jesus. He is at the center of it all. He defeated Satan for you. He is your strength to help you overcome temptation. And He is your Savior who forgives you when you fail. With Christ in your life, because you are *with Him...with Him* in your ears, *with Him* in your mouth at His Holy Table, *with Him* at the center of it all for you, Satan has no chance. Amen.