

Luke 4:1-13

Two hundred plus years ago, battles were fought and won much differently than they are today. When General George Washington led our soldiers against the British Redcoats, you were expected to fight the battles with honesty and integrity. When Washington crossed the Delaware River with his men at night in order to surprise the enemy and gain the upper hand, England cried, "Foul!" and accused Washington of stooping to undignified guerilla tactics which had no place in war. Today we expect the enemy to do that which is undignified, dishonest, and beyond the pale of human decency. Terrorism does not play by any rules. Terrorists strap bombs to women and children. They turn passenger jets into devastating weapons. They couldn't care less about being ethical and humane in their tactics.

We should not be surprised by this because the one who is at work within the hearts of such terrorists is the devil himself. Satan follows no rules of any kind. If a tactic of his works, he uses it. He does not care about collateral damage. To him, the more the better. He is the classic bull in a china shop as he prowls throughout God's creation seeking only to attack and destroy.

Some have wondered what the devil's plan was with Jesus in the desert. Was the devil trying to cause Him to sin? But God cannot sin because He is holy, and the devil would have known that. A professor of mine once described Satan as a madman beating his head against a brick wall. Yet, as I consider this text, I do not see him so much as mad and insane, but as devious and cunning. Satan was not tempting Jesus to sin--an impossibility for Him--rather, he was tempting Jesus to separate Himself from us.

Whether it was turning stones into bread, accepting the glory of the world, or allowing the angels to bear Him up, the devil, through all of these temptations, was turning Jesus away from you and me to Himself. If our Lord, the One who came to deliver us from sin, death, and Satan, could be sidetracked from His mission and think of His own needs and wants, it would be the same as a shepherd leaving his sheep to tend to himself, and the sheep would fall into the hands of the wolf.

But Jesus would have none of it. He did not even blink an eye. No hesitation, no, "Well, let Me think it over first." Every temptation Jesus met head-on with the words, "*It is written!*" Jesus had not come into this world for Himself, for His need, for His desires. He came to join Himself to you, to join Himself to your sin and die for it. This was His focus from start to finish, and He would not even for a moment allow the devil to come between Himself and you. So Satan failed. I know it's Lent, but I'll say the word anyway..."Hallelujah!" The devil's devious plan did not succeed. Jesus did not lose focus. He did not succumb to temptation. Jesus won, end of story, right?

Remember years before 9/11 when a terrorist was caught in New York City with a bomb before his plan could work? End of story? Hardly. They put their heads together and came up with their 9/11 plan. If we think Satan will run away with his tail between his legs because Jesus beat him, we are spiritually naive. "Surrender" is not in Satan's vocabulary. So he could not master Jesus in the desert. He "*departed,*" it says, "*until an opportune time.*" And even though every time Satan attacked, Jesus won, do not for a moment think that now the coast is clear. Until Judgment Day the devil is looking for opportune times, not with Jesus anymore, but with you and me.

With young people, Martin Luther says, temptations come mostly in sexual ways. With older Christians they come in the form of greed and also pride. And with us, the devil has much more success. He tempts us to sin, and we fall, day after day. And any one of us who disagrees with this is

already in Satan's grasp. And when Satan tempts us to sin, he does one of two things. If we give in, he accuses us and causes us to despair, or to harden our heart in unrepentance. If we do not give in, he puffs us up with pride so that we think well of ourself for resisting his temptation. He is the master of this. If we are leaning one way, he pushes us that way. If we are leaning the other way, he pushes us that way. If a young Christian has sexual desires, the devil pushes him to satisfy his desires. If a Christian is strong in the faith, the devil pushes him toward sinful pride. We can't win, people. He's stronger than us, more cunning, he has no conscience, no fear, and he will not give up. We cannot win against the devil.

Nonetheless, as Luther writes in his great hymn, "*Our victory has been won, the kingdom ours remaineth.*" More than anything, Satan's goal with us is the same as it was with Jesus--to separate us. He wants to separate us from Jesus by separating us from His Word, by separating us from His Sacraments, by separating us from our pastor, and from other Christians through whom God works. But Jesus will have none of it. Notice I do not say, "we will have none of it." We give in. We go along with all these separations. We fall easily into the devil's hands. But Jesus is the One who has no part of it. He is your Shepherd who will not allow the wolf to drag His sheep away from Him.

And you are His sheep because you are baptized into Christ. In those waters He claimed you. That's why Satan wants you, but Jesus, your Shepherd, fights for you. That's why he has brought you here again today--to put His living words in you. You cannot defeat the devil, but Jesus' words within you do defeat him. And so meditate upon the words you hear today. Throughout the week, meditate on them. Jesus brought you here to put His own self in you. Here in the Sacrament He gives you His body and blood as a defense against Satan. He has brought you here to forgive you because throughout the week you and I have fallen into sin many times. We need forgiveness. That's Jesus' business. He is here to forgive you, and He does.

He simply will not have His sheep falling into despair over their sins. He is not here to punish you for failing last week. He lifts you up. He pardons everything about you that is wrong. He gives you hope because He promises you eternal life through His death and resurrection for you. Just as the despair left the woman caught in adultery when Jesus forgave her, so through His words to you today, Jesus drives the despair that Satan has worked, out of your heart.

So here it is in a nutshell. Jesus won in the desert. He won at the cross. He won every battle against the devil. And His victory means everything for you. It does not mean you will always defeat Satan, and if you do not, you are no longer Jesus' precious sheep. But it does mean that when the devil is after you, you can come running to Jesus. When you give in to temptation, come running here to Jesus' words of comfort. When you fall, come running to His Sacrament where His flesh and blood help you in your spiritual battles. When Satan overpowers you, come running with ears wide open to your Shepherd's voice. He has words of pardon for you. He forgives you because you are His sheep. For these reasons, your victory has been won, and for you, my friend, for you the kingdom yours remaineth. Amen.