

Luke 4:1-13

"One size fits all." This may be true of certain items you can purchase in the store, but it is not true of temptation. Temptation is a very personal thing. The devil makes sure that he tempts us in those areas where you and I are personally weak. He did not tempt Jesus with a warm fur coat in the desert; he tempted Him with food because He was hungry. With us also he makes each temptation a custom fit. If your eyes have the tendency to wander, the devil will tempt you with sex. If your eyes are faithfully in the Word of God, the devil will tempt you to become proud and think you are stronger, better than others. If you enjoy the outdoors, the devil will tempt you to make the outdoors your church on Sunday mornings. If you are dedicated to your job, he will tempt you to place your job as a priority over God's Word and Sacraments. Satan is an expert tailor. He designs each temptation perfectly. He sizes us up with exact measurements. He knows us much better even than we know ourselves.

Yet even as he crafts our temptations, there is a thread which he uses that is the same for every temptation. This thread can be summed up with this phrase: "It's all about you." We see this thread being weaved as he tempted Jesus. "You're hungry, Jesus. Turn this stone into bread. After all, it's all about you." On a high mountain the devil showed Him all the glory of the world in a moment of time. "This can all be yours, Jesus," he tempted Him, "And you deserve it because, after all, it's all about you." On the pinnacle of the temple the devil tempted Jesus to throw Himself down. "God will keep you safe," he told Him, "And people will flock to you and be amazed by you. After all, it's all about you."

This same thread Satan uses today to weave together his temptations. To the young woman who discovers she is pregnant at the wrong time in her life, the devil says, "Have an abortion. It's your body, it's your life. It's not about that fetus in your womb; it's all about you and what you want." He says the same thing to the man who is unhappy in his marriage, "Divorce her, find someone else. After all, it's all about you."

Whatever temptation you are faced with, you can be certain that the devil appeals to the ego inside all of us. "He said something bad to you. Don't forgive him; hold a grudge. After all, it's not about him, it's about you and your hurt feelings." "You're tired this morning. Sleep in. You can go to church next week. It's about you and getting your rest." "Don't report that income on your taxes. The government will just waste the money, but you need the money. It's all about you." "There's no need to study the Bible. You learned it when you were young. You have more important things to do than sit in a Bible Class. It's about you and what you want."

This "it's all about you" thread works with us; it did not work with Jesus. Because for Jesus it was never about Him, about His wants and needs. It was always about the sinners for whom He came to die. If it had been about Jesus, then He would not have gone to the Jordan to identify Himself with you in His baptism. If it had been about Jesus, then He would not have taken the painful road to the cross; then He would have turned those stones in the desert not only into bread, but into steak and potatoes, an air-conditioned Corvette, and a lavish resort complete with servants and swimming pools.

But for Jesus, it was never about Him. The devil tempted Him to think of Himself, but His thoughts were only about you. The devil tempted Him to put Himself first, but you were always first in His mind and heart. Satan could not stop Jesus from putting you first in His life, so now instead he stops us from putting Jesus first in our life. And he is very good at it.

And if there is any one of us here today who thinks we are immune to Satan's temptations; who thinks we can best him at what he is best at, because we have what it takes; who has little concern, therefore, with all the temptations facing us day by day--if that is you or me, then Satan has already won and we are defeated. The devil wants you to think that he is no one you should take seriously. He wants you to trust more in your own strength and less in Christ. Satan is not trying to turn you or me into a non-believer tomorrow. He's thinking long-term. A little each day he pulls at us. He knows that the battle for your soul is not won in a day. He's thinking weeks, months, years from now. And so a little each day he tempts you to put yourself first and Jesus second.

Is there any hope for us? We are no match for Satan. How can we ever overcome and gain the victory? The answer lies with Christ. Satan may be an expert tailor when weaving our temptations, but Jesus has woven you a piece of clothing for you to wear against the devil. In your baptism Christ put His holy innocence upon you. He clothed you in those sacred waters with His garments of salvation. His forgiveness covers you within and without. This means, friend, that you and Jesus are joined together. You are clothed with Christ and whatever temptation Satan uses to assault you, it has to go through Jesus. Don't take off your robe. Don't leave it at the baptismal font. Wear it night and day. Do not neglect Christ's Word and Sacraments. And as you wear Christ, you are kept safe in Him against the devil.

This story in St. Luke 4 is not really about showing us how to defeat Satan; it is proclaiming that in Christ, Satan has been defeated for you. Picture with me a boat, a large boat out in the ocean, perhaps in the Indian Ocean where pirates still patrol today. And that boat, filled with passengers, is attacked by a pirate ship. Everyone in that boat is in danger. All life aboard could perish. But one man, just one, who is stationed at a gun, a cannon, fires at that pirate ship and sinks it. That one man saves the life of everyone on board.

That Man is Jesus Christ. God in the flesh, He came to be with us in our boat, the church. Satan would have destroyed us. He would have taken Jesus' church and dashed it to pieces upon the rocks of hell. But Jesus stopped him. He defeated him in the desert, and at the cross, and at the empty tomb. He defeats him for you in your baptism, at the Holy Supper, in the preaching and teaching of His Word. Jesus fired the cannon at Satan. From His mouth came forth words which sunk that pirate..."It is written...It is finished...Take eat and drink...I forgive you." Jesus did not fire the cannon at the devil to show us how. He did it because we fail, because we are weak, because we give in to temptation.

Jesus won in the desert, and that means you have won in Christ. In the boat of the church you are safe with Him. Jesus won on the cross by dying for you, and this means you are forgiven. You are forgiven even when you and I give in and fall. You are forgiven even though we are pitiful, and weak, and sinful. You see, it's not all about you. It's about Jesus who is for you. Your baptism into Christ reminds you that you are in the boat with Him, and His victory is yours. Your place at His Supper reminds you that it's not about how sinful you are, but that Jesus was poured out for you; that you are forgiven no matter how often you fall into temptation.

Is the pirate dead? No, but he is defeated. And so when he attacks you, one little word can fell him. Not your word or my word. Not our strength. Jesus...He is your Savior. Amen.