

## **First Sunday in Lent March 10 2019**

### **Gospel: Luke 4:1-13**

In the last part of the third chapter of Luke, Jesus has just been baptized. While he is praying - the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him. The voice from heaven declared Jesus to be God's Son and Beloved.

So, it is Jesus- Son of God, Beloved, (full of the Holy Spirit) who is led by that same Spirit into the wilderness.

The wilderness. A place of barrenness. Wind and sand. With only his identity post baptism to sustain him. Hungry. With nothing but rocks around to eat. Alone, except for the diablo- the devil, the accuser and slanderer. And in the face of the accuser, Jesus wins...diablo leaves until another time.

Often, this text is used to hold up Jesus as a moral example to us. Any of you remember the WWJD bracelets? What Would Jesus Do? Those reflects this understanding of Jesus. When you need to know how to act, just do what Jesus did. When you are tempted, be like Jesus.

It strikes me that this use of the text, this understanding of Jesus as moral role model, really is a prime example of what Martin Luther called the Law (with a capital "L"). You know the Law, Luther said, because it has words like; must, have to, should. Words of command. And the reality of the Law is that we will always fall short of fulfilling it. We will sneak that little extra into our purse or our pantry because we don't trust that God will provide. We'll demand that God show us what's really going on at this moment because we don't trust without

understanding. We will do all those things that make us human. That make us ...not Jesus.

While the Law has its uses (we'll talk about some of this in our journey through Luther's Small Catechism this Lent) it is not what saves us. Our striving, our trusting, our doing better do not, cannot save us. Because we will always fall short of what the Law requires. This is the reality expressed in Luther's understanding of the Third Article of the Creed. I cannot, by my own understanding or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him.

Rather, the good news, the Gospel that saves us is that Jesus is not our moral example, but our Savior. The good news is that Jesus is not us.

Martin Luther remarks that one thing this text does is instruct us about who Jesus is. He is the Savior. He is the one who has freed us from our sin through his own hunger and fasting in the wilderness. Through his victory over temptation. Through his trusting in God and God's promise. Through his refusal to test God. Through his refusal to trust in his own power.

Jesus did these things we cannot. So that he might do what God has sent him to do- to heal the sick, lift up the lowly, release the captives, let the oppressed go free. So that he might be our Savior. This is the the Good News! Thanks be to God.

Now, since we don't have to worry about our salvation in these situations, what do we do when we are confronted by temptations like these in our own lives. Do we just blithely give in to them? Do we say, well it doesn't matter because Jesus has saved me and I know I can't resist this anyway?

By no means! If anything, knowing that through Jesus we are saved, not through anything that we have done, frees us to strive to do the same. Even knowing we'll fall short. What do we have to lose? Nothing! Jesus has got us covered!

What do we have to gain? Becoming more fully who we are created to be thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit (I cannot by my own understanding or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him...but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith..). We, too, are in the wilderness full of the Holy Spirit that has come upon us in Baptism and we walk this wilderness accompanied by that Holy Spirit and bearing the identity as Children of God.

Jesus shows us in this passage the power that resides in that identity as Child of God and in the faith that is given to us through the Holy Spirit that has come upon us. Because the power of that identity from baptism and that Holy Spirit reside in him.

Jesus is in the wilderness with nothing but his identity made clear to him in the waters of Baptism. Son of God, Beloved of God and filled with the Holy Spirit which is with him in the wilderness. We know this because the verb that is used for led is one that implies an ongoing action. The Spirit is leading Jesus throughout this time in the wilderness. Throughout this time in his being tempted.

A couple of things to note, Diabolo does not deny Jesus' identity. He quotes scripture. This is the wiliness of the slanderer, the tempter, using just enough of what is true to try and lead Jesus, to lead us, into that which denies who we are. That which denies who God is.

Hey, Jesus, you are Son of God... well just zap these rocks and have a snack.  
Aren't you really hungry? Forty day fast and all.

Hey Jesus, look at all these kingdoms of the world. They have been given over to me and I'll give them to you. Just bow down and worship me. Think of all the good you could do as their ruler.

Hey Jesus, you're sitting on your daddy's house... just throw yourself off, because it says nothing will happen to you. Haven't you ever wondered about that? Don't you want to see what will happen?

There is nothing totally unreasonable about these things either...is there. I mean, if you're hungry and you've got the ability to use a little of the power you have to change things so you get something to eat, you do it...right? What harm does it do to kneel down to diablo when there is all the good you can do when you have power over the nations? It's natural to want to test out these promises of God, right? After all, how do you know they are true if we don't test them?

And it would be so easy for Jesus to do these things. After all, he is the Son of God. But just like he will later in the text (and already has in the lectionary), Jesus redefines what it means to be the Beloved. The Son of God.

It means not making use of the power that he has to be in solidarity with us who are human. Jesus replies "It is written, humans do not live on bread alone". Saying in effect, "And I am human". This is the part of my identity that counts, now. It means having faith in God alone. Trusting in God's promise that we will have daily bread...which Luther defines as everything we need to live.

It means remembering who is God and who is not, as the First Commandment says, You shall have no other gods. Luther reminds us that our god is the thing we fear, love, and trust the most. The thing we believe will save us. Worship, trust, God alone.

It means having faith, trust that what God says is true without testing it first. Because that is the very definition of faith.

And because the Son of God did these things, we don't have to. And because the Son of God did these things, empowered by the Holy Spirit we too can strive each day to resist those temptations that creep into our lives.

The temptation to believe we will be saved if we only get enough stuff, or money, or food, or shelter. Rather than trust that in all things God provides our daily bread; food, shelter, clothing, transportation. And to remember that as the Body of Christ we might be the way in which God provides that daily bread to others.

The temptation to believe that if we bow down to another god; power, control, position, wealth, then we can make the world better. Then we won't have to worry because we are in charge. Rather than remember that it is the God who created all that is; us, this world, the blue sky and green grass, who is in charge. That it is this God whose love expressed for us in Jesus has saved us.

The temptation to not trust this same God. To constantly ask why? To push always to know entirely. Forgetting that in so doing we are seeking to know the mind of God and in effect to be God. Rather than relax and trust in the one who gave each of us life. Who created this world that sustains us. Who provides everything we need for life.

Ultimately, all of these temptations come back to one thing. Lack of trust in God and God's promises to us. Promises to provide, to protect, to love and care for us. Promises that as we trust, life will be better than life lived on our own.

I believe, help my unbelief! This is the cry of the Father of the epileptic boy when Jesus comes down the mountain after the transfiguration. I know that is my cry. I believe, I trust, help my unbelief, my distrust. Perhaps this is the Good News that comes to us today. That in our imperfect trust in God, when we give in to temptation, we know that we can cry out to Jesus "I believe! I trust! Help me trust more! Trust better!" And that Jesus hears, and that in him our imperfection is made perfect.

Please pray with me. "Oh Lord Jesus. We believe, help our unbelief. Help us, for the temptations of this world are many; to trust in our own power to provide. To believe that we should be in control. To sit in judgment of God and God's ways. Forgive us when we fall into these temptations, and renew in us a right spirit, one that trusts always in your grace, your mercy, your love to guide us. Amen."