

Pastor Kenneth Mars

St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

First Sunday in Lent (Series C)

February 14, 2016

Text: Luke 4:1–13

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The first Sunday in Lent stands out to me for a number of reasons. First, the gospel reading is always the account of the Lord's fasting and temptation by the devil in the desert for 40 days. That event in the life of our Lord is not only important, it's most important, eternally important, you might say. Second, the sermon hymn is always *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* (LSB 656). That great hymn is typically associated with Reformation Sunday; that's quite natural. But Martin Luther didn't know of such a thing as the Reformation. That's the name historians and theologians gave the evangelical, churchly work that Luther and many others did in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Luther wrote *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* for the First Sunday in Lent keeping in mind the gospel reading about the Lord's fasting and temptation.

In that great hymn, Luther speaks a good deal about the devil and his fallen angels. He describes Satan as the "old evil foe now means deadly woe; deep guile and great might are his dread arms in fight..." (st. 1). In st. 3, he says "though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill; they shall not overpower us." I wonder what we moderns think about Satan and fallen angels. Do we take him seriously anymore? Or is he safely relegated to the category of creepy decorations meant to give children a harmless fright on Halloween?

The Bible describes Satan and his fallen angels as being quite real. And most dangerous. I'd like to give a very brief, Biblical description of Satan, the very same Satan that Jesus confronts as He was fasting in the wilderness. Satan is first encountered in the Garden of Eden in the form of a serpent. He's the tempter who casts doubt upon God's character and the validity of His Word. He's the:

- accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10),
- murderer from the beginning and the father of lies (Jn. 8:44),
- roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (I Pe. 5:8),
- scheming tempter who casts flaming darts at God's elect people, against whom we must stand with the whole armour of God (Eph. 6:10–16),

- he lays snares by which people are trapped to do his will (II Tim 2:26),
- dragon of Rev. 12 who seeks to devour the Christ Child and the Church,
- the prince of the power of the air who works in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2),
- and then all 4 gospels describe devils possessing people subjugating them to physical, mental, and spiritual suffering, the worst case being John's account of Satan possessing Judas Iscariot just hours before he betrays the Lord to arrest and crucifixion (Jn. 13:27),
- ultimately, on the Day of Judgment, Satan is cast into the lake of fire and sulfur where he will be tormented day and night forever (Rev. 20:10).

Much more could be said about Satan and his angles. None of the Bible passages give the slightest hint of Satan being a mere trifle. We must take him quite seriously lest we endanger our eternal souls. The Bible constantly warns us against the devil and his many and various ways of destroying faith and every form of goodness. Today's gospel reading from Luke 4 certainly describes Satan as real, powerful, and determined in his rebellion against the mission and ministry of the Lord Jesus.

The contrast with the Lord Jesus couldn't be clearer. Point by point let me make the comparison. Jesus is the eternal Son of God the Father who takes on human flesh and blood from the Virgin Mary. This Jesus is the:

- advocate who speaks on our behalf before God the Father (I Jn. 2:1),
- the way, the truth, and the life (Jn. 14:6),
- Good Shepherd who seeks lost sheep in order to bring them into the fold of eternal life (Jn 10, Ps. 23),
- Savior who clothes His people in eternal righteousness and grace (Gal. 3:27, Rev. 7:14),
- Sets people free so that believers can follow the word and will of the Father (Jn. 8:36, Gal 5:1),
- Christ who dies to save His people from sin, death, and Satan (Heb. 2:14, 7:25),
- King over all creation (Eph. 1),
- All 4 gospels describe Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah who promises to dwell graciously in the hearts and minds of His baptized people,
- ultimately, Jesus is the Lord over heaven and earth who rules and reigns from the Father's right hand for the eternal good of God's elect people (Rev. 5, 20-22).

It's this Jesus and this Satan that face each other in the wilderness of Israel. Though I have contrasted Satan with the Lord Jesus according to their respective work in the world, you must not conclude that somehow Jesus and Satan are mere opposites of each other. Something akin to the yin and yang of Eastern mysticism. Jesus is the eternal Son of God. Satan is a created angel, powerful and deadly to be sure. But He is not the equal to the eternal Son of God.

In that we see the height of Satan's arrogance and the love of God's Son for us humanity. Satan actually believed He could defeat God's Son through His various temptations and deceptions. Such damnable arrogance is astounding.

That Jesus would subject Himself to the devil's evil is equally amazing. Why would the Lord Jesus willingly place Himself in harm's way? What motivation did Jesus have in giving Satan a real opportunity to tempt Him? It was nothing short of divine love for His lost, harassed, and enslaved people. Or to put it more concretely... Jesus faced Satan, the real Satan I described earlier, and willingly allowed Himself to be put in harm's way so that Jesus could save you and me and all His beloved people.

In Luke 4, the recently baptized Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, is led by the same Holy Spirit into the wilderness to fast and pray for 40 days. Jesus goes into the wilderness as the New Adam upon whom the new creation is to be established. Jesus goes into the wilderness as the new Israel upon whom the new people of God would be formed. In short, Jesus is the world's representative. He prays and fasts on your behalf. And He defeats the devil on your behalf too! This is Jesus, fixing what had gone wrong since the first Adam and Eve's original sin. This is Jesus remaining faithful to His heavenly Father when Israel of old had followed at path of unbelief and disobedience.

Satan began his temptation by using the same tactic he tried on Eve in the Garden of Eden. "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread" (vs. 3). God the Father had just declared Jesus to be His beloved Son as Jesus stood in the baptismal waters of the Jordan River. Are you what the Father says of you? Prove it! Unlike Eve, who began doubting God's Word, Jesus quotes God's Word in defense, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone'", quoting Deut. 8:3.

Satan continues. So you think you're God's Son come to establish a kingdom, like Israel of old? I'll save you some trouble. Satan shows Jesus the glories of this world's kingdoms in a moment's time. "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then will worship

me, it will all be yours” (vs. 7). Why bother with all this fasting and praying? What was that Holy Spirit thinking in driving you out into the wilderness in order to make you hunger and thirst and suffer as you are? Everything you want, I can give you! Want to save the world? Go ahead. It’s so easy. Just worship me. Jesus quotes Deut. 6:13, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve” (vs. 8).

A third tactic. You like quoting the Bible, Jesus? Well, two can play that game. Satan takes Jesus to the pinnacle of Jerusalem’s temple. “If you are the Son of God (he can’t help but try adding doubt one more time), throw yourself down from here, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone’” (vs. 9–10). Satan is quoting Psalm 91:11–12. It’s today’s appointed psalm. It’s printed in your bulletin!! You see Jesus, the Bible says you can do this. It’s ok to jump off the pinnacle. The angels will protect you. And the people will believe in you. Who needs all this fasting, praying, and suffering?

Well, Satan doesn’t quote Psalm 91 correctly. He left out 4 words in vs. 11: *in all your ways*. In other words, the promise of angelic protection is attached to faithful obedience in all things, not just some things. In response, Jesus quotes Scripture correctly for a third time. Deut.6:16, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test’” (vs. 12).

Satan is rebuffed. He leaves “until an opportune time” says Luke (vs. 13). Satan will show up again from time to time but most especially during Holy Week and on Good Friday. His goal was to keep Jesus from dying on the cross in obedience to His heavenly Father. But Jesus remains faithful and does everything you need for your life and salvation. You too are baptized into the Jesus’ victory over Satan. God’s Word is your mighty weapon to be used at all times, but especially during trial and temptation. The body and blood of Jesus shed on the cross in loving obedience to His Father is given to you to nourish you against the evils of the world, your sinful flesh, and yes, the devil too. Luther concluded his great hymn with “Our vict’ry has been won; The kingdom ours remaineth” (st. 4). This is true because of Jesus. In Christ, we are triumphant now and for all eternity. Glory be to Jesus!!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.