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

First Sunday in Lent (Series A)

March 5, 2017

Text: Matthew 4:1–11<sup>1</sup>

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

We Christians believe that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God, trustworthy and reliable in all its parts. Upon God's Word alone all faith, doctrine, pious works, Church practice and customs, etc., are to be established and evaluated. But did you know that the inspired authors of the 66 Biblical books did not break their writings out into chapters and verses? It wasn't until the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD when Christians divided each book into chapters. And it wasn't until the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD when the chapters were then divided into verses! Or to put it differently, the chapter and verse divisions are NOT inspired by the Holy Spirit and the majority of Christians did not know what we take for granted: the chapters and verses of the Bible.

Most of the time, the chapter and verse divisions are very helpful. Sometimes they aren't. The division between Matthew 3 and 4 is one such example. It's not bad but it does obscure the impact of today's reading from Matthew 4. So rectify that...let me read to you Matthew 3:16–4:3. And I'll explain why this is critical.

<sup>3:16</sup>And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; <sup>17</sup>and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." <sup>4:1</sup>Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup>And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup>And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

Two things need to be highlighted: the temporal and theological connections between Jesus' baptism and His desert fasting and temptation. The temporal connection is established in Matthew 4:1, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." As soon as Jesus was baptized He went into the desert fasting and there faced the devil's temptations. Our Lord's baptism initiated the spiritual battle in which Jesus would engage for the next three years of His earthly

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon is prepared with hearty thanks for my forefathers in the faith: Martin Luther and C.F.W. Walther.

ministry, culminating in our Lord's final and decisive victory on Good Friday, Easter and Ascension.

A related observation is that the baptized Jesus enters into this eschatological battle through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord didn't take this task upon Himself. It was given to Him by His heavenly Father through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and that only after Jesus was baptized. "Christ did not wage this war for Himself. He battled as the Surety, the Mediator, the Substitute of the whole human race, for all men, for us who are gathered here" (C.F.W. Walther, *Gospel Sermons* v.1 p. 160).

Make no mistake about this, dear baptized saints of God. The spiritual struggle against Satan, sin, and evil was given to you by the Father through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The reason for your enlistment is that you are baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ. God the Father has appointed you for this path of repentance, faith, and discipleship. It is not a self-chosen path. On the eve of our Lord's crucifixion, Jesus told the 12 apostles, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit..." (John 15:16).

Your enlistment into this noble struggle began when you were baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Do not seek out spiritual struggles. They will come as the Holy Spirit guides and directs you. (*Thank you Martin Luther for this insight.*) For we, and all of God's people, are surrounded by the fury and rage of Satan and his fallen angels, the deceits and allurements of the world, and the sinful weaknesses of our fallen nature. What we are to seek at all times, is God's grace as it is revealed to us in Christ Jesus through His inspired, Holy Word. Never forget who you are, dear saints of God: children of our heavenly Father, holy and beloved in His sight for the sake of Jesus and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

And that leads us to the theological connection between Jesus' baptism and temptations. As the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the Jordan River, God the Father spoke from heaven and said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (3:17). Did you notice Satan's first words of temptation spoken to a hungry, fasting Jesus, "If you are the Son of God..." (4:3). God the Father just spoke His Word of truth about Jesus, "you are My Son." Didn't the Father say – just 3 verses earlier – "This is My Son"? In one way or another, Satan's three temptations try to get Jesus to doubt His identity, to misuse His identity for selfish reasons, and to abandon His identity as the Father's well-pleasing, beloved Son.

The devil is clever, powerful, and cunning. But he isn't very creative. These are the same kinds of temptations he threw at Adam and Eve in the Garden as well as the children of Israel at the foot of Mt. Sinai and during their wilderness wanderings. It's the same kind of thing he throws at us: doubt who you are as God's child, misuse your redeemed status for selfish gain, or to abandon our salvation in unbelief, idolatry, and despair. But the Father has spoken about who we are: redeemed, sanctified, forgiven, beloved children and heirs of His eternal kingdom! That's who you are in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But the devil would have us forget who we are, abuse our good-standing before the Father, or seek another path without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, thus leading to idolatry. Nothing less than our eternal salvation is at stake in our Lord's baptism and desert temptations. "Had Christ been conquered in the wilderness, woe unto us."

"Happy are we, however! Christ won, won gloriously, not for Himself, but for us. The bonds are severed, and we are free. Everything that we had lost through the fall in paradise Christ had again regained for us in the wilderness. Man ate of the forbidden tree; Christ hungered forty days and forty nights. Man wanted to be like God; the Son of God suffered for it when Satan skeptically and mockingly said to Jesus, 'Are You the Son of God?' The serpent said to man, 'Did God actually say?' and misled man by garbling the divine word. Here Satan tried that on Christ. He remained firm however, and said without wavering, 'It is written.' The serpent seduced man to pride and presumption, when he dazzled him by promising, 'When you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil' (Gen. 3:5). Satan also tempted Christ with pride and said, 'All these I will give You, if You will fall down and worship me' (Matt. 4:9). Christ, however, triumphed; Satan had to leave, 'and behold, angels came and were ministering to Him'" (4:11) (C.F.W. Walther, *Gospel Sermons* v.1 p. 161–162).

"Now my friends, if you want to be eternally blessed by the battle of your Savior, your heavenly General, nothing more is demanded of you and all men than that you play the part of a believing spectator. The important thing is not that you learn how to fight against sin and Satan from Christ's example, but the first, the most important, the main thing is that you learn to believe that Christ battled for you, in your place, for your freedom and salvation. Whoever knows and feels his sins, whoever knows that hitherto he has served the devil, that he was full of unbelief, contempt of God's Word, pride, vanity, lust, and love of the world, or that he at least has not really battled against the world, flesh, and Satan, let him merely look to his Savior. This Champion

from the stem of David has held the field for us. This Lion from the tribe of Judah has conquered for us. Though you may have fallen ever so deeply, though you may have even begged the devil's pardon, free yourself from this disgraceful tyranny. Side with Christ; then you are victor over sin and hell. Then Christ also divides the spoils of war with you—forgiveness of sins, righteousness, life, and salvation. (C.F.W. Walther, *Gospel Sermons* v.1 p. 162).

Because Jesus won this battle, you too are victorious in Christ Jesus. That is the chief and essential thing you must know from today's Gospel. "This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none (st. 3)...Our vict'ry has been won; The kingdom ours remaineth" (st. 4, LSB 656).

Although we are victorious in Christ, we too face the temptations of the Devil. But know this, Christ our Lord and Master, who has won the battle for us, leads us by the power of the Holy Spirit in our daily battles against sin, temptations, and Satan. "How does Christ do battle? How is He victorious? Satan tempted Jesus to unbelief and He answered, 'It is written.' Satan tempted Him to false doctrine, and He answered, 'It is written.' Satan tempted Him to pride, and He answered, 'It is written'" (C.F.W. Walther, *Gospel Sermons* v.1 p. 165).

Jesus believed what God the Father had said in His inspired, Holy Scriptures. Three times Jesus quotes God's Word; three times the devil is defeated. God's inspired Word is our weapon and our shield for it gives us Jesus, our Savior. "If you stay with the Word, you remain with Christ. If you remain with Christ, you remain in grace. Grace will lead you to eternal victory. Amen" (C.F.W. Walther, *Gospel Sermons* v.1 p. 167).

✠ 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.