

Introductory

This is the reading for Lent 1 in the TLH one-year lectionary. The parallel accounts of the Temptation of Jesus from the other synoptics are the appointed Gospel texts for years A, B, and C respectively in both LW and SB. Like many of the synoptic accounts, each account of this incident is a bit different. Mark's is greatly shortened. Luke omits the second temptation.

At some point, you may want to make the distinction that Jesus was tempted as we are tempted, but that He did not sin, and then quote where the Bible says just that. People wonder about that, and it is easily explained. The Formula of Concord article on "Free Will" identifies four states of free will. This would be a good Sunday to also talk about those four states.

We note here the context of the Temptation. Matthew goes from the infant Jesus to the flight to Egypt and subsequent return to Nazareth, and then he jumps to John the Baptizer and the Baptism of Jesus. Right after His Baptism, marking the beginning of His "earthly ministry," Jesus heads out into the wilderness for the specific reason that He be tempted by Satan.

Continuing the OT theme, God in the Person of Jesus does battle with The Devil in the Wilderness. The fight began with Eve and then with Adam, and The Devil won. God then said to Satan in the presence of Adam and Eve that One would come who would "crush the head" of The Devil, but only after Satan had "wounded" His heel.

The history of the OT is a history of The Devil's attempts to keep that from happening. He does not want his head to be crushed, but that is the only way that man will can and will be saved. This "protoevangelium," the "first gospel" from the third chapter of Genesis, is fulfilled in Jesus, who defeats Satan here as He resists his temptations.

The ultimate victory occurs when Jesus, who had been wounded on Good Friday, rises victorious on Easter Sunday, a crushing blow to Satan. The observance of the Lenten Season is an anticipation of those events and of Holy Week in its entirety. Help your hearer to better understand the chronology of events and how that plays out in the Church Year.

In Genesis, we are told that The Devil took the form of a serpent. We are not told here what form he took or what The Devil looked like. The other option is to think that he had no form and was not visible, but a voice that spoke to Jesus, an option that seems to me to be less plausible and less in line with how the account reads.

A sermon that focuses on the anatomy of temptation may deal with the similarities between the temptation of Eve and Adam and the temptation of Jesus, and on the very dissimilar result. In both instances The Tempter begins by attempting to put doubts about what the hearer knows know into the minds of that hearer. In Genesis he asks Eve if God really said that.

In Matthew he uses the word "if," and the subjunctive mood to create uncertainty and in an attempt to create doubt in the mind of Jesus that He really is the Son of God, tying that sonship into Jesus' ability to turn stones into bread and jumping off a high building. In each

instance when The Devil tempts Him, Jesus responds in the way that one ought to respond. He quotes Scripture. Eve, who should not even have been having a theological conversation with Satan, should have quoted God, and Adam could have done that, but neither of them did. In the OT, when people are tempted, they seldom if ever do this. They often appear rather to give in rather easily or even cooperate with the Tempter.

When Jesus does the right thing by responding with Scripture, and the Devil responds in kind - sort of - misquoting Scripture right back at Him. He does the same thing today, speaking to people via the mouths of various false prophets who misquote the Word of God to suit their own purposes and teachings.

While the Lutherans are doing exegesis, drawing the meaning out of the text, the others are doing interpretation, gleaned the Bible for verses that seem to support their own ideas. Since the Enlightenment, human reason has been increasingly injected into Divine Writ, and since no two people think alike, religion today is legion.

The Lenten Season is a time of reflection and penitence. It would be good to review that for your parishioners. It would be good to review some other basic information about the season for the children and for the adults who have forgotten those things or maybe not really ever been clear on them.

Matthew tells us that when this time of temptation was over two things happened; the Devil left Him and angels came and served Him. Luke adds "until an opportune time." That time would come on Good Friday, when we find Satan again speaking to Jesus, this time through the mouths of the religious leaders, soldiers, and people "if ...

Textual Notes

1. Matthew begins by telling us that Jesus was led " ὑπὸ τοῦ Πνεύματος εἰς τὴν ἔρημον – by the Spirit, into the wilderness." The Spirit must be the Holy Spirit, which means that Jesus was supposed to go. The location of the wilderness is a matter of conjecture and not important, and I have come to speak of Him being "out in the country" or "in the pasture."

The wilderness is a place where there are people around, but not a lot of them, and there is not lot of economic or social development. The area from which He had come, where John the Baptizer was working, was much more populated. In fighting against temptation, Jesus is working without a net, getting no help or support from any other person.

The Spirit leads Him to where He is supposed to be for the express purpose "πειρασθῆναι ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου – to be tempted by the Devil." Mark calls him "Satan" = "enemy." That verb is an aorist passive infinitive, emphasis on the temptation being inflicted on the person of Jesus, having been passively led to that place by the Holy Spirit.

If early Christians hermits learned anything from their attempt to escape sin by removing themselves from people, they learned that being alone only made it worse. Jerome thought he could get away from temptation by going hermit, but he found "In solitude pride pounces swiftly upon a man. If he has seen no human being, he thinks himself of some account."

2. His being in the wilderness for forty days reminds us of the forty years when the Israelites

wandered in a different wilderness before their entrance into Canaan. Those were not good days, they were often tempted, and they often they gave in to it. The wilderness is often the place of the enemy, as DP Scaer points out in *What Do You Think About Jesus?*

At this point, you may want to explain the whole fasting thingie. The OT dictates fasting for a plethora of occasions and reasons, the practice has always been a fundamental part of Christian piety, Luther speaks of it in the Small Catechism in a very matter of fact manner, and all over the world people who are otherwise religious – or not – fast.

The Lutherans in America, including not a few LCMS, are even getting on board with the whole idea of fasting, although many of them are still suspicious of a practice that sounds too “catholic.” I suppose such thinking is part of the remnant of our pietism, or perhaps of our Golden Age of Lutheran Phariseeism, or just the ingrained idea that “catholic” is bad.

It is not at all likely that Jesus went completely without food and drink for forty days. In Judaism, if the fast was for one day, then you would do that, but for fasts of a longer duration one would take sustenance, but bread and water only. Having fasted for forty days yes, “ὑστερον ἐπείνασεν – He was hungry,” the figure of speech known as understatement.

When God is giving commandments to Moses on Sinai, Moses tells us (Exodus 34: 28), that “he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water.” One time (1 Kings 19: 8), when Elijah was in the wilderness, before fleeing Jezebel, “he arose, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights” until reaching Horeb.

The First Temptation - Turn the Stones into Bread

3. Matthew tells us Jesus “προσελθὼν ὁ πειράζων – came to the one tempting,” a present active participle that indicates that tempting people to sin is part of the very being of Satan, and it is. His job, and that of the demons, and that of the workers who work for him is to cause the Christian to be removed from the Kingdom of Light to the Kingdom of Darkness.

Having come, the one who is tempting " εἶπεν αὐτῷ – spoke to Jesus," and the first word out of the mouth of the Devil to Jesus is the conditional sentence "Εἰ Υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἰπὲ ἵνα οἱ λίθοι οὗτοι ἄρτοι γένωνται – If you are the Son of God, then speak, so that these stones should become loaves of bread.” Those words will appear later on in the NT.

The conjunction “if” used in conjunction with the subjunctive mood (should) indicates doubt that Jesus is Whom Satan knows Him to be, and the word serves as a challenge to Jesus to do what Satan says in order to prove him wrong, and to prove His identity. It’s a good first step in tempting somebody, one that worked well on Eve; “did God really say that?”

The verb “to speak” is in the Imperative mood; Satan is commanding Jesus to do something. He knows Who Jesus is, and he also seems to know that by means of His Word, Jesus could in fact do what he is commanding Him to do. For His part, Jesus knew the same, and had just been baptized, received the Holy Spirit, seen the dove, and heard the voice from the sky.

We further note that the attack uses food as a weapon, the same weapon that worked so well on Eve in the Garden. A trip to Wal-Mart will give a vivid illustration of the power of food to get people to eat when and what they know they should not. A hungry person’s craving for food is one of the most powerful of all impulses for both man and beast.

When talking about how Jesus has been fasting for forty days, help the hearer to feel (pathos)

what that might feel like. Everybody knows what it's like to be hungry and thirsty. Talk about a time when you were really hungry and thirsty and imagine what it would be like to fast. They will think of a time when they were really hungry, and then they will feel that hunger

The simple fact that the Devil is telling Jesus what to do is in and of itself seriously twisted. As a matter of principle, it seems to me that if the Devil commands the Son of God to do something, then He must not do it, sort of like *adiaphora*. The same could be said of the Christian; if the Devil, the World, and your flesh tell you that you *have to* do something...

St. Augustine has a great take on Changing of the Water into Wine. He points out that what happened at Cana was indeed a miracle, but God does that sort of thing *every day* and we barely take note; when we put seeds into the ground, and it rains, and those seeds grow into vines, and those vines bear grapes, and those grapes are turned into wine (Homily on John 2).

Jesus must not do that thing commanded by Satan, especially when it's something as freakish as turning stones into bread. Often, Jesus does miracles that fix things in creation that have been broken by the fall into sin; sickness, blindness, killing storms, and the like. There is nothing broken about a stone, and it has no need of restoration, certainly not as bread.

At Cana, Augustine asserts, Jesus just speeds up what is otherwise the natural process - helped along by the winemaker - of water being turned into wine. (Tractate 8 and 9). There is no natural process to speed up where stone becomes bread. If you grind it up, you don't get flour; you get ground up stone. Just because you *can* do something doesn't mean you should.

Getting back to the question of what form the Devil took, if any, you almost wonder if Jesus is with somebody He knows, maybe a friend. Knowing a little bit about the Devil, this would be one mode of attack. We note that Jesus engages in conversation with the devil, and we note further that He does not call him "Satan - enemy" until the proposed Temple jumping.

4. Jesus responds with The Word of God, "Τέγραπται – it has been written" yet one more attestation to the power of That Word. When the little man from Argentina says that God did not wave His magic wand at creation, he is correct. There was no wand. God spoke, and it happened. The little man from Argentina is otherwise mostly incorrect on the subject.

You might want to talk about the efficacy and power of that same Word today. It works marvelous things in our lives. When you subject yourself to the Word, that is a good thing, and the Word has free rein to do good things to the person who heard it. Add that Word to water and to bread and wine, and we know very specifically what those good things are.

The specific quotation here is from Deuteronomy 8:3, words that Moses spoke to Israel when he was relating the goodness of God to Israel. Moses is speaking specifically of the daily manna - daily bread - that God gave to them when they were wandering for forty years in the wilderness, yet one or two more striking similarities between that and this.

The Second Temptation - Jump Off of the Temple

5 - 6. The Devil continues to invite Jesus to question whether or not He is really the Son of God, and continues telling Jesus what to do; "Εἰ Υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ Θεοῦ, βάλε σεαυτὸν – If you are the son of God, throw yourself down" from the highest point of the Temple in Jerusalem. At the time of Jesus, the highest point would have been seventy feet off the ground.

Give people something to measure that height. The steeple on my church is seventy feet off

the ground. I know that because I asked the guy who knows those sorts of things. How high is the water tower in town or that grain bin on the highway? The seventh floor of a building. A jump off of it would almost certainly be fatal, and only a fool would do such a thing.

Having been so easily and quickly rebuked by the simple utterance of the Word, Satan tries it himself. In the manner of false prophets from the beginning until the present age, the Devil quotes from the Bible, and in the manner of false prophet from the beginning until the present age, he quotes it incorrectly, but close enough that the average listener might miss it.

Here he quotes from Psalm 91, "He will give his angels charge of you," etc. in this case omitting something very important to understanding the meaning of the text. The part that he leaves out is "in all your ways," meaning as you live out your day to day life - not doing things like jumping off of buildings - the angels will watch over you.

That's an important caveat that when omitted changes the fundamental meaning of the text, and he does it for a fundamental reason; he wants the Bible to say what he wants it to say, not what it says. Politicians and false prophets do the same thing for the same reason all the time, and if they knew how much God frowns on that sort of thing...

7. Jesus responds by correctly quoting Deuteronomy (6:16), where Moses tells Israel not to put God to the test "as you tested Him at Massah," the citation taking us once again to the forty-year wilderness wanderings. Israel is expressing their own doubts about God (Exodus 17), and God provides water for them when Moses strikes the stone.

Such things occurred often during those forty years, and the real question then was; how many things does God have to do, and how many times does He have to do them, before people will believe that He is a gracious and loving Father. Here, in an act of absolute faith? Quite a few, as it turns out, about as many times as in the current age.

The Son refuses to put His Father to such a test, knowing that The Father has proven His trustworthiness countless times, many of them recorded in the OT, so far one - His Baptism - in the NT, with many to follow. The Christian also should not put the Father to the test, as we also know Him to be a Father who can be trusted.

It is Satan who wants the Christian to do something stupid, and who whispers into his ear "don't you trust God? Didn't God say that He would watch over you?" Stupid things may include standing in the middle of I-80 or another Interstate Highway, but even more stupid is flipping off God every Sunday; He is offering you good gifts, which you reject to do what?

The Third Temptation - Worship Me

8 - 9. Telling Jesus what to do is not working, so the Devil puts away the stick and breaks out the carrot. He takes Him to a very high mountain, and he shows Him all the Kingdoms of the world in all their glory – the good stuff, not the problems – and he promises to give Jesus stuff, a lot of stuff, a lot of good stuff, but there's a catch, and it's a big catch.

The traditional site of the mountain is Quarantania, and google images brings up a number of goofy images, as well as some of a mountain. Since most of your hearers have never been to Quarantania, located between Jerusalem and Jericho, talk about a more familiar long view, one close to home that will put that long view into the mind of your hearer.

From Pike's Peak you can see to the eastern horizon, and on a clear day you can see the same from the Sears Tower in – now the Willis Center, referred to by the locals as "Big Willy" – every direction, or the Gateway Arch. In flat farm country, you might talk about the view from the top of a leg or bin or church steeple or water tower.

Exegetes and commentators struggle needlessly to grasp how Jesus and Satan could see "πάσας τὰς βασιλείας τοῦ κόσμου – the kingdoms of the world" from Quarantania, or for that matter from any mountain in Palestine. One of them even wonders - using a decidedly politically un-correct term – about the "Indians." How could they see the Indians from there?

Not to worry. The offer is not just for the Kingdoms that can be seen from a particular high point in Palestine, or even for "all kingdoms." The promise is that he will give Jesus everything; all of creation. Continuing with the conditionals, the Devil says to Jesus "Ταῦτά σοι πάντα δώσω, ἐὰν πεσὼν προσκυνήσῃς μοι – all this I will give to you.

It's like this; the word "kingdom" is a feminine noun, and "Ταῦτά " is a neuter pronoun. If the promise made by Satan to Jesus was to give (future tense) to Him *only* "all the kingdoms of the world," that pronoun would have been in the feminine gender, not neuter. Channeling Helen Gurley Brown, Satan tells Jesus that He can have it all. But there's a catch.

Jesus can have it all on one condition, " ἐὰν πεσὼν προσκυνήσῃς μοι – if, falling down, you should worship me. " The conditional nature of the gift of Satan to Jesus is once again expressed with the verb in the subjunctive mood, as well as with the word "if." All that Jesus has to do, the Devil declares, is worship me, and this is all yours, and of course it's a lie.

The words used to articulate his request are the same used to describe the posture of the three disciples last week upon hearing the voice from the cloud; they fell down and worshipped Jesus. This is serious business, involving the foundational first commandment, disobedience against which is the root of every other sin. Where do you start with the problems with that?

That Jesus should be offered all His Creation by the Devil, if only He would consent to worship the Devil, is absurd, because it all belongs to Him anyway. If ever there were irony in the Bible – and there is irony in the Bible – it is here. The first irony is; that the fallen angel who had been booted from heaven would think that Jesus would recognize him as God.

Perhaps the greater irony is that all of creation belongs to Jesus and not to the Devil, and none of it is his to give. The Devil is offering Jesus the opportunity to have it all, which most people want. But more to the point, the devil is offering this to Jesus without the coming cross and all the pain and suffering and messiness that is associated with that.

This temptation is no less than an offering for Jesus to abandon the thing for which He came to this earth in the first place; the salvation of all men from sin, death, and Satan in exchange merely for the world and all things in it. Far from requiring Jesus to take the road that goes through the cross, the Devil is offering Jesus Him something for the here and now.

Instant gratification. There is a certainty as well as a concreteness to what he is offering to Jesus, while the other way – on the surface, without regard for faith – involves the uncertainty of death and lacks visible substance. Oh, and one more thing; The Father of Lies is lying, and that's what he does. He neither can nor will be able to give anything to Jesus.

10. With that, Jesus has had enough. Using an imperative verb, now He commands "Ὑπάγε, Σατανᾶ - Go, Satan," naming him "enemy." Going once more to the OT, he articulates the First Commandment with the words Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 6:13. We note once more the response of Jesus and the power of the Word to rebuke the Devil, who leaves.

11. Having heard those words, and the command that he make like a tree and leave, Satan leaves, "ἰδοὺ ἄγγελοι προσήλθον καὶ διηκόνουν αὐτῷ – see, angels came and were serving Him." The second verb "Suncovsco - to serve" is found thirty-seven times in the NT, almost always in connection with the serving of food, and it probably was the best tasting food ever!

Having fasted for forty days and nights, we already know that He was hungry. And then having battled Satan, He's probably even more hungry, and so it is that His Father sends angels to feed Him, and I would imagine that it was quite a feed. Likewise, He gives us quite a feed here on earth, a precursor to the "heavenly feast" later on.

Law/Gospel

Win/Lose or Winners/Losers - People are very familiar with these concepts and they know that it's better to be a winner than to be a loser. The World often thinks of Christians as "losers." Sometimes they will even verbalize it, and sometimes it looks like they are correct. But in the way that a good story often unfolds, things are not as they seem! You may want to reference the Book of Revelations, John's assurance to Christians that things are not as they seem.

If you want to go in a slightly different direction, you can talk about how we are "losers" before God because of our sin. That's the Law, and if you use that word you'll get their attention. The shepherd is the one who determines how much and how severe that Law should be. The rule is that the harsher the Law, the sweeter will be the Gospel.

First Adam/Second Adam - A sermon on this theme would be essentially a compare and contrast between the manner in which Eve and Adam handled temptation and the manner in which Jesus did. Bad news; Eve and Adam were unsuccessful. Worse news; so are we. Good News; Jesus was successful! Great News; His success is our success! Paul talks about the First and Second Adam at length in 1 Corinthians. It's never a bad idea to mirror Paul's understanding of these things. You really can't go wrong.

Sermon Titles

A Tale of Two Temptations

A Tale of Two Adams

Proper Use of the Word

Hymns

LSB 562 – All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall

LSB 569 – In Adam We Have All Been One

LSB 000 – In the Hour of Trial

Sing Lenten Hymns during the Lenten Season, even though they are Sundays *in* Lent.

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, Iowa