

Matthew 4.1-11

Invocavit

1 March 2020

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Iesu Iuva +

Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Satan went out and wandered the world, roaring, and seeking whom he might devour.

And it should have been easy this time around. Just as easy it had been before. For there was nary a ruse that had not worked.

At first he came in the form of a serpent. That in itself should have been enough to warn Eve, and then Adam, off his deception. For the Lord God had given Adam and Eve dominion over all the creatures, and not the creatures over Adam and Eve. But the presence of a talking snake? Not even that was red flag enough for this temptation to sin.

And Satan laughed. This thing was so easy.

And the first Adam fell into sin. Where he had had nothing but perfect righteousness and life forever; where he had had nothing but joy in a garden that produced everything he needed in life; where he had had the tree of life and God as his companion; where he had perfectly understood who God was and how He was minded toward him—now he had sin and death; by the sweat of his brow he lived, and in agony he would die; the way to the tree of life was barred, and he had God not as friend, but as enemy; and every intention of God was misunderstood. The sound of the Lord God walking in the cool of the Garden was no longer a comfort to Adam, or to Eve, but a terror.

For that's what the worm of sin does in the mind and heart: it turns the kind, loving, friendly God into foe. It turns His gracious providence into the curse of a life lived under the specter of death.

Nor did Satan stop there. To one of Adam's descent he came. To Job. Righteous before God through faith; righteous before men by deed. And he afflicted Job, taking away his livestock and his living, striking his children dead, turning his wife, his only comfort in the midst of his suffering, against him, laying boils all over him from crown to sole. Job cursed the day he was born.

And Satan laughed. This thing was so easy.

For how could Job, whose faith was rooted and anchored in the God who had given him life—how could Job curse the life the Lord had given? How could Job, whose very existence was proof positive of the loving care of his God—how could Job, in the face of suffering wish to deny the Lord his God by dying, knowing full well the evil in the world? And how could Job, so aware of God's power and might and his own frailty—how could Job dare to "go to court" with God and accuse?

But that's what the worm of sin does in the mind and heart: it reads God's intentions toward you not by what God has revealed, but by what it suffers in life. And it puts God on trial. And all the while...Satan's laughing.

Not even that was the end of it. And it was getting so easy.

Satan set his sights on Saul, anointed to be king of God's chosen, holy people Israel, himself chosen and holy to the Lord. The Lord's anointed, the Lord's messiah, the Lord's christ. And entering into Saul, he drove him to madness. Though he himself was anointed, messiah, and christ Saul rose up in murderous rage against his successor as anointed, messiah, and christ, David. To deny God's work in anointing David was in effect to deny God's work in anointing Saul—each work the same as the other. And at last, despairing of God's promise and love toward him, and despising his anointing, he committed suicide. And his body suffered the fate ordained by God for idolatry—cremation.

And Satan laughed. This thing was so easy.

So it should have been easy this time around, too. Just as easy as it had been before. For, you see, there was nary a ruse that had not worked. The First Adam? Not immune. Righteous Job? Not above temptation. Saul, the chosen and anointed of the Lord? Easy picking.

And so to righteous Jesus Satan comes. Up to the New Adam strides the prince of darkness, who had sidled up to Eve in the form of a snake. Into the presence of the Lord's Chosen and Anointed dares to come he who was cast out of heaven by God.

Because this time—it should be easy.

But this time around, the ruse is being played the other way. The Lord Jesus Christ is not *a* righteous man. He's *the* Righteous Man. He's not a shadow messiah and christ, seen only in the light of the capital-M Messiah, He *is* the capital-M Messiah, to whom all other anointed point. And He's not just a son of Adam, created in another's image, He is the Son of Man in whose image the First Adam was made, the Second Adam, the serpent-head-crushing Offspring of Eve. Jesus Christ, God's own Son, who shows Himself faithful to the faithful, who shows Himself blameless toward the blameless, who is pure toward the pure, but who shows Himself crooked to the crooked (Ps 18.26); who gives grace to the humble, but mocks the mockers (Prv 3.34).

It's *this* Adam, this Christ, this Righteous One, God's own Son, whom the mocker of mockers approaches, for whom the crookedest of the crooked lays his snare.

And Satan has met not only his Match, but his Defeat.

For what is bread to One whose hunger is the hunger of pious fasting in obedience to the Spirit and His Father? What is the agency of angels to save to the One who lays down His life to take it up again, the Holy One whose bones will not see corruption? And what is the world and its kingdoms in all their splendor to the King of the Jews whose crown is thorns and whose throne is the dead wood of a cross?

The ancient church fathers called Christ's human nature the worm on the hook, and His divine nature the hook. You know how that is. If you've fished at all, you do what you can to disguise the hook by the bait that's on it; and if you catch a fish, it's not because the fish went for the hook, but the bait, and got hooked because the bait covered the hook.

So it is in the Temptation in the wilderness. Satan is a murderer of men. And he carries his murder out with lies. He deceived Eve, then Adam, and brought death. He put the lie to God's gracious care for Job, and caused him to curse his own birth. He deceived Saul to despair of his anointing, who took his own life and who in his unbelief suffers the fire of eternal hell.

And here, Satan has another one. Flesh and bones. A Righteous Man, to be sure. But he's already contended with flesh-and-bones righteous Job. And won. The Lord's Anointed—His Messiah and Christ. But he's already contended with flesh-and-bones anointed Saul. And won. A New Adam. But that? That's nothing. That's where it all started, with the flesh-and-bones first Adam.

So Satan takes the bait.

But God sets the hook. There in the wilderness, there on the heights of the Temple, there on the mountain top looking over all the kingdoms of the world stands not Adam, or Job, or Saul ... or you. But God's own Son. The Valiant One contending with Satan. For you. God showing Himself crooked with the crooked, and mocking the mocker.

You know, there's no greater mockery than allowing your opponent to think he's bested you.

And that's exactly what the Lord Jesus does. The bait has been taken. The hook is set. And like any fish, Satan will not let go. The bait rebuffed him three times already in the wilderness. But Satan will not give up. Just think about it: Why in the world was there so much demon possession in Jesus' day? Because the prince of demons, Beelzebul, was at Jesus' neck the whole way. All the way from wilderness to cross. And there on the holy cross Satan thinks he's got him. His prey is dead. The mocker mocks. The trumpets of hell sound forth. And Satan dances a jig on the grave of Jesus.

But still, even then, God is showing Himself crooked with the crooked.

And mockery of all mockeries! In the very moment of his victory Satan was overthrown, the sins of the world paid. The Second Adam rising from death pulling up the first Adam and all his descendants by the nape of the neck. The Only Righteous had been laid in the grave, but His bones did not decay. Instead, the Anointed One, the Christ, turned His own grave into the watery death of sinners, that sinners buried with Him by Baptism into death might with Him be raised by the glory of the Father and walk in newness of life.

And now that Valiant One, that God's Word, that Son of God—though devils all the world should fill—He's by our side upon the plain with His good gifts and Spirit: with His Word and His Sacraments. Satan still goes out, seeking whom he may devour. To be sure. But it is for naught. For Christ has made His victory your victory.

Just hew close to His side. In the face of your temptation, this Temptation in the wilderness gives us no formula, no secret sauce, no mojo, to overcome—except for Jesus Christ. Cling all the more fervently to Him. For, bait and hook, He's your Divine Victor. And the kingdom yours remaineth.

Amen.

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