

February 21, 2010

SOLI DEO GLORIA  
First Sunday in Lent

Good Shepherd, Novi

**MATTHEW 4:1-11**  
**JESUS OVERCOMES THE ENEMY.**

*In the name + of Jesus.*

Since the days back in the Garden of Eden, the devil has been tempting man to sin against God. And while the devil has been busy throughout the history of the world, he has not been especially creative. He has had no need to be. His temptations still work.

God had placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He created them so that he would have someone whom he could bless. They were the objects of his affection. In turn, Adam and Eve were to love and serve the Lord. They were able to demonstrate this by obeying the one commandment God had given them: **“You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” (Genesis 2:17)**

Then Satan appeared in the form of a serpent. He immediately challenged God’s word. **“Did God really say...?” (Genesis 3:1)** he asked. Then he questioned God’s love. **“God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:5)** *“Adam, Eve, if your situation will improve by eating from this tree, why did God forbid it? It seems to me that God is holding out on you. Makes me wonder if he really loves you.”*

Adam and Eve weighed the possibilities. Eve saw that the fruit was desirable for gaining wisdom. Adam considered what it would be like to be like God. They took the fruit and ate. They fell into sin and under a curse. And with that one temptation, all mankind was lost.

Even though the devil’s most damaging work was done in the Garden, he has not stopped working. He still taunts. He still tempts. He never leaves you alone. He works especially hard on you because you are Christians. You are not his, and so he wants to devour you and destroy you. But he is not creative. He has no need to be. His temptations still work. He still challenges God’s word. He still questions God’s love. He still leads you into sin.

**“Did God really say...?” (Genesis 3:1)** he challenges. He would have us believe that God is holding out on us, that there is something better for us but that God forbids it. The devil convinces us that we know better. We can make our own choices. We can do what makes us happy, what is easier, and what gratifies. We don’t need God to tell us what do to or how to live. His ways are too old-fashioned, too hard, or too embarrassing. We will just do what we want. All of this reasoning is just an echo of Satan’s temptation: **“You will be like God.” (Genesis 3:5)**

In fact, we try to make ourselves gods when we go on sinning as we do. We despise God’s will and follow our own. Jesus declared, **“It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’” (Matthew 4:10)** But we do what we want instead. Therefore, with each sin we commit, we are idolaters. Repent.

After Jesus was baptized by John, **Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1)** Once again, a holy man stood upon the earth. Once again, the devil came after him. And while the devil is relentless, he is not creative. His temptation was the same. At Jesus’ baptism, he had heard the voice from heaven

declare, **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17)** So, the devil begins, **“If you are the Son of God....” (Matthew 4:3)** *Was that voice in heaven to be taken seriously? Is that really who you think you are? Well, if you are the Son of God, you have the power of God. You’ve been fasting, and now it’s time to satisfy your hunger. Tell these stones to become bread. (Matthew 4:3) Or does God really forbid you to use your power? Strange. Why would he do that when one simple word would cure your hunger and solve your problems?*

Unlike Adam and Eve, unlike you and me, Jesus overcomes the enemy. Even though Jesus is in very nature God, he **did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. (Philippians 2:6)** He would not exalt himself over his Father. He would not stray from the word of the Lord, as if the word of the Lord is an inconvenience. On the contrary, **“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4)** Jesus did not question the word of the Lord, he took his stand on it. Therefore, Jesus overcame the enemy.

Of course, Jesus was not limited to only three temptations in his lifetime. The devil is always a prowling lion, looking for someone to devour. He continued to tempt and taunt Jesus throughout his life. He continued to challenge God’s word and question God’s love. *Suffer the agonies of God’s wrath and die just to redeem the world? Really?? Come on, Jesus. I can give you the world! What kind of Father would subject his Son to that? – if you really are the Son of God.*

But Jesus overcomes the enemy. He defeats every temptation. He flees from every sin. He obeys every command fully, gladly, and willingly. He worships the Lord and serves him only. And so the Father is well pleased with his beloved Son.

What’s more, God is well pleased with his beloved Son when he goes to the cross with his perfect life. There, he offers himself up as the payment for your sins – yes, for all of your sins when you have pitted yourself against God; when you defied God’s will and did yours; when you believed that you knew better than God does. Jesus’ perfect life answers for every sin. Jesus’ perfect death atones for sin.

Jesus overcomes the enemy. Learn that lesson well. He does not do it so that you can now go toe to toe with the devil, trying to match him Bible verse for Bible verse. Believe me, the devil knows the Bible much better than you do. If you think that you can outwit the devil, you will be devoured by him. If he caused your first parents to sin in their holy innocence, what will he do with you who are sinners? The serpent is still crafty. He still seeks to devour you. You are no match for him; or, as we sang earlier, “On earth is not his equal.”

That is why you must always cling to Jesus. Jesus overcomes the enemy. He is your hope in everything. Jesus is your refuge from every temptation, from every sin, and from death itself. Jesus does not play around with the serpent; rather, he crushes the serpent’s head. By his death, Jesus absorbed all the venom of sin and its damning curse. By his death, Jesus destroyed the devil and his kingdom. Listen to his word and do not doubt God’s love for you – for God’s love is spelled out in the blood of Christ. And the blood of Christ is poured out for you for the deliverance from your enemies – from sin, from death, and from the devil.

After Adam and Eve had sinned, God expelled them from Paradise. They gave into temptation, and that meant death. So he sent his cherubim to guard the way to the tree of life. Jesus, however, overcomes the enemy. **The devil left him, and angels came and**

**attended him. (Matthew 4:11)** The angels came to Jesus with blessing, for he is God's beloved Son with whom God is well pleased.

And now you who have been baptized into Christ are also God's children. God sends his angels to guard and keep you. When your last hour comes, God will send his angels to carry your soul into Paradise which has been opened by the blood of Jesus Christ. And when the Last Day comes, Jesus will come with all his angels to raise you up from the grave. Then, he will bring you to the glories of heaven where you will eat from the Tree of Life, and where you will worship the Lord your God and serve him only, gladly, and freely. With this, God is well pleased.

**In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**