1St Sunday in Lent

March 1, 2020

Series A Matthew 4:1-11

The temptation of Jesus

Grace, Mercy, and peace to you in Christ, Amen.

Last week we talked about the transfiguration of Jesus, which happens near the end of his earthly ministry. You were there to see Jesus in his full glory and honor, along with Moses and Elijah, Peter, James, and John. You were reminded of the superpowers that Jesus gives to you. His power to transform you with the aid of the Holy Spirit, which lives within you. You can forgive and retain the sins of others. The Holy Spirit uses his power in you to change others.

None of that is possible if Jesus loses the battle that we heard in our Gospel reading. If, -- Jesus – loses -- to Satan -- then there is no salvation! There is no forgiveness of sin! There is not the body and blood of our Lord! No celebration at the table of the Lord. Because the Table of the Lord would not be a sacrament nor would Baptism. There would be no washing of our sins. We would forever remain eternally separated from our Triune God dead in our sin and our trespasses. There would be no Lord's prayer, no Palm Sunday, no Easter Sunday, and his birth would have been the same as any other birth just another child born into sin with no hope of being reconciled to God.

Thank God, our heavenly Father, that he had a plan from before the beginning of creation to provide a means to salvation and reconciliation. You know what happened in the Garden of Eden when the serpent deceived Eve and she gave the forbidden fruit to Adam, how sin entered the world at the moment. You may also know the promise God makes in Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

This verse is the first prophesy and promise that God will provide us with a Savior. The reading from Matthew is a continuation of the showdown between the Devil and Jesus. You might say it's the 5th round of a 15 round heavyweight championship fight with everything on the line for the premiere title fight. The Holy Spirit carries Jesus out into the wilderness immediately after his Baptism by John the Baptist. The Holy Spirit then allows the Devil to come and tempt Jesus after Jesus 40 day fast in the wilderness. The Devil appears to have Jesus where he wants him, tired and hungry after all; he has not eaten anything for forty days and forty nights. The Devil has Jesus all alone with no one to encourage or coach him on what to do next. So, let's step into the ring with Jesus and the Devil and see how the fight is going. Beginning with round five. The bell rings, and the Devil says to Jesus, "If or since you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread." The first punch the Devil throws is a sucker punch to try and get Jesus to use his superpowers for his benefit. The Devil is trying to get Jesus to use his powers for selfish gain. The second sucker punch the Devil throws is to get Jesus to abuse his power for his benefit. Then he follows that with a combo punch to gut where Jesus is already weak because of his extreme hunger. It seems as though the Devil has hurled a fury of punches at Jesus.

As round five comes to a close, Jesus comes back and responds with his fury of punches that cause the Devil to step back and maybe even stumble a bit. Jesus says to Satan, "It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." It is God who feeds us both from his mouth and his hand. Round five ends in a draw.

The Devil takes Jesus to another place for round six. This time the Devil has Jesus high upon a pedestal. He begins his onslaught of punches with, "If or since you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." Wow, now the Devil is quoting Scripture against Jesus. Except that there is one problem with what the Devil says. He takes the Scripture out of context and tries to use it against Jesus for the Devil's gain. Jesus comes back much more quickly this time a punch directly to the face and jaw of the Devil. Jesus punches back with, "It is also written, do not put the Lord your God to the test." The Devil is indeed stumbling around. Satan needs to come up with one more good fury of punches so that he can get Jesus off of his neck and chest before the Devil falls to the ground to be stepped on and have his head crushed by Jesus as Genesis Three promises.

 The next round of this 15 round fight begins. Satan takes Jesus to yet another place to assault Jesus with yet another Temptation. This time the Devil takes Jesus to a very high mountain and shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. And their glory. Then the Devil begins the second part of his punches and temptation by saying to Jesus, "All these I will give you IF you will fall down and worship me." Wow! The Devil has taken his game up a few notches. This type of deception certainly worked against Adam and Eve and every one since. Twist Scripture and use it out of context, which the Devil did in the previous round. Now he dangles a glazed carrot or very enticing piece of candy in front of Jesus' eyes. He also tells Jesus an outright lie. The Kingdoms of the earth are not the Devils to give to anyone. They are God's to give, and God's alone to give.

Jesus also up's his fury of punches and comes back immediately. Against the Devil and wins the round with his fury of blows. Jesus knowing the Devil has lied to him, calls him on it. And second, Jesus knows that he is both the Son of God, and God himself does not waste a second. He commands the Devil, "Be, gone; Satan! Knocking him backward and has the ropes holding him up just barely. Then Jesus throws one more punch before the round ends. The final blow Jesus uses in the round are these words, "You shall worship the LORD your God and him only shall you serve. Jesus knows that the God you worship is also the God you serve. So, there is only one true God and everything and everyone else is an idol or a false god.

With these words spoken, the Devil has been outdone. He flees the ring before Jesus crushes his head. The angels come then and minister to Jesus. The fight will pick back up on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. See you then.

Let's take a break for a few moments from the ring and reflect on how this pertains to us. Satan is still very much active and tempts everyone, particularly those who call upon the Name of the Lord. The Devil wants to lead us astray so that we will eventually deny our faith. He does it with very subtle lies half-truth's, then once Satan tempts us and has our attention. The Devil entices us with one more thing that looks even better than the first, and he keeps going until he has convinced us to forsake our identities as children of God.

So, don't give Satan an opening, because all he needs is the smallest of opportunities to slither and slide into before he blows the door wide open and knocks it off its frame. Know the Word of God; keep your armor on. Keep it oiled and polished by being in God's word daily. Ask him to help you through each day and every hour so that you are not tempted. Ask Jesus to perfect you in your weakness. Watch Jesus protect you and send the Devil running for his very life. The Devil knows he can't touch you unless you or I give in to his schemes and step outside of the protections Jesus has put in place for you. This is why I quote the Apostle Paul at the end of this and every sermon with these words, "Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard and or keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.