

Deuteronomy 26:1-11
Romans 10:8b-13
Luke 4:1-13

Luke 4:1-13

⁴Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." ⁴Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" ⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" ⁹Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' ¹¹and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" ¹²Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

We live on the wrong side of Easter to really understand this story. We know that Jesus Christ is God, raised from the dead. He lived his life without sin. And we know that because we are viewing the life of Jesus from the perspective of a job already done.

So, we lose the impact of this morning's Gospel lesson. We know how the story came out. It's like the difference of saying, "When Peace Lutheran started out thirty-seven years ago there were no guarantees for a struggling congregation." And we would all know that was true. But if we said, "We have decided to show the same faith and dedication to this ministry and we are going to commit ourselves and our time and our money to this ministry", that is different.

Acknowledging that a risk took place in the past is not the same as facing a risk in our own future.

In this morning's Gospel lesson, Luke records that Jesus was **tempted** by Satan. This is a conflict. It is *not* an accomplished fact. The very best of good is in a head-to-head fight against the very worst of evil.

Because it happened so long ago, because we know that Jesus did **not** fall into sin, we have an unfortunate tendency to think that Jesus could not have lost. We get this picture of Jesus in our minds – walking around in the desert, sneering at the devil, supremely confident. We think of Jesus almost bored that Satan would show up to bother him, as if there was never a doubt that Jesus would defeat Satan.

Because we know that Jesus *did* win the fight, we tend to forget that he could have lost. That is what "temptation" means. The issue is in doubt. The one who is tempted is caught in a dilemma...and the decision is not yet made. The Bible uses the word "temptation".

We forget that Jesus could have fallen to sin and this victory was not a forgone conclusion at all. In the conflict described in this morning's gospel lesson between Jesus and Satan we are reading about **real** temptation. Jesus was a real human.

This was a **real** struggle. If there was no possibility that Jesus could have **lost** this struggle then there really was **no** temptation. If there was never a possibility that Jesus could fall into sin, then it wasn't much of a victory for him to stay sinless.

When we down-play Jesus' temptation to follow Satan, we cheat ourselves of the **power** of Jesus' victory. To really celebrate Jesus' victory, we first have to know that he was in a real battle. The scripture describes the battle. "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who in **every respect** has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

The fight that Jesus had on his hands to live a perfect life is the same fight that would be required of you to live a perfect life. Think of how you would have to struggle to live in perfection. That was the struggle of Jesus, because Jesus was completely human.

We tend to think that Jesus had an easy time with temptation, because he never gave in. That is nonsense. He had a life-long struggle.

The longer you struggle against temptation the harder the fight becomes.

And that is true for all of us.

All people have their good points and bad, of course. But some people tend to do more of one or the other. We characterize some people as outstandingly "good" or outstandingly "bad".

When we think of particularly "good" people, we tend to think of them as not having too much trouble with temptation. Satan is not a problem to them, because, after all, they are such good people. **It is easy to suppose that it never occurs to those people to sin.** On the other hand, we think that "bad" people are the ones who really know the power of sin. We think people who spend the largest part of their time in revolt against God are the real authorities on the power of temptation.

That's not the way it works. People who waste their lives in sin **never give themselves the chance to know the power of temptation.** Those people lay down the first time temptation taps them on the head. They don't bother with the struggle. They don't test their strength.

You learn the power of temptation by fighting it. Not fighting it for five minutes, but for hours...and days...by wrestling with it for years. That's when you come to know the force of sin - when you fight it.

The strength of temptation becomes clear only when you fight it. And people who give in to temptation at the first hint of conflict in their souls **know nothing about how strong temptation can be.** - The longer and harder a person fights - the more he knows the strength of his opponent. The more he knows the power of sin. The more he is wearied by the struggle.

So, because the longest and hardest fight against temptation was the life of Jesus, Jesus knows the power of sin better than anyone. Not just because he is God and he knows all things - but because he found out first hand. Jesus was the only one to ever hold out against temptation. He was the only one to overcome sin. Jesus knows the struggle. This morning's Gospel lesson describes a real temptation that continued throughout Jesus' ministry. It had to be that way. **If there was no possibility that Jesus could sin, then he would not have been truly tempted.** He would have been play-acting. This struggle with Satan would just be a pose, an illustrated lecture on how to handle sin...instead of a fight with sin.

If Jesus was not really in a struggle with sin, he could not have beaten it. But this was a real battle and that means that Jesus could have lost.

The fact that Jesus could have lost this battle with Satan might make us uncomfortable. It may be that we have the thought..."It just couldn't be. I have too much respect for the power of Christ to think he ever had any trouble with Satan." It might seem to weaken Jesus to think of him as having even the possibility of sin.

But it is this fact, that Jesus could have sinned, that is his strength. Jesus, truly human, like us, truly capable of sin, like us, **fought temptation at its strongest and won.** The battle was not a put up job. Satan was not paid to take a fall. **Jesus Christ was strong enough to win** - strong enough to overcome temptation with his own righteousness.

Think of yourself. When you are tempted to sin, do you ever give in to that temptation? Do you ever sin? Your answer may well be, "Yes, I sometimes sin. I'm human." Exactly. We are human and **humans are potentially sinful.** We can't imagine being so strong that we, as humans could overcome every sin all our lives and live in perfect obedience to God. That would require a tremendous strength and courage.

The humanity, **the potential sinfulness**, of Jesus is how we know his tremendous strength and courage. Because he *was* human...and he *did* overcome sin.

We would have no hope with God who **could** not sin...but with God who could have sinned, but didn't. Who overcame sin with righteousness. Who fought and won. **There is hope.**

Not with a god who was never tempted - but with a God who was tempted and won. Jesus' humanity is our hope. Only in Jesus, a human, could God come to live with humans. God came to us and now we can be reconciled with God. Through Jesus we can be part of the Body of Christ.

We can take our place in God's church and do his work as the struggle continues between God and temptation - **our temptation.**

That's where the battle is being fought today. God's struggle with Satan is fought in our lives and we still have strength for the fight. We have the inspiration of our teacher who also fought the same fight...and won.

The struggle continues. We are called to fight temptation in our own lives. But our temptations have already been met by Jesus Christ and defeated.

Let's turn to him for strength in the struggle. **This is a fight we can win.**

It is not the case that Jesus was not bothered by sin. Temptation turned its full force on Jesus - and Jesus beat it. Jesus defeated sin; we are reconciled with God. Because of Christ's victory we can live through our own struggles hand in hand with God.