

Luke 4:1-13

Lent 1; March 6 & 7, 2022

In 1991, the Ukraine claimed independence from the Soviet Union and the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC) declared fellowship with WELS. It's a small church body consisting of about 700 members, 17 congregations and 11 pastors. But it is a church body that has been faithfully proclaiming God's Word. After the Ukrainian War started, one of our WELS pastors has maintained contact with the head of that church body. Some of you have read his posts online, and I will make them available for those who don't have that access. Even though financial support is being gathered through our Synod, I have reached out last week to that WELS pastor to see how our grade school kids might be able to encourage the children and families who are there. I had asked him if there would be some way that we can let our brothers and sisters in Christ know that they are not alone and are in our prayers.

I think, for that reason, the people of Ukraine have been on my mind and heart. I don't think that I'm not much different than any of you. Because I haven't known a lot about that part of the world, I have been reading a lot just to wrap my mind around it. As I look at multiple news websites both here and abroad, it's almost hard to believe what it must be like to live with such destruction happening in that country. I can't understand how someone can wish to annihilate no matter the cost.

As I thought about that this week and our Gospel Lesson for today, I asked the question: *Isn't that what Satan wants to do with us, with those who believe in Jesus?* That's what he tried to do with Jesus in our text. There is a war that is going on there. It's more than just three temptations. Satan is going to war with the Son of God. Unlike the wars of this world, this war has eternal consequences. This morning in our text, we get to see a glimpse of Jesus' battle with Satan in the desert. Jesus had just barely begun his ministry. Why did Jesus need to come into this world to fight with Satan? Over a period of six days, God created a perfect world. He gave this perfect world to Adam and Eve to care for. They had everything they could ever have imagined. Life was good!

Then it changed. It was gone. Satan rebelled against God. The Apostle John describes this war in the book of Revelation: **"And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him."** (Rev. 12:7-9) Ever since that day that Satan was thrown down from heaven, he wanted to ruin God's perfect creation. Like a well-trained army, he succeeded at his mission. Adam and Eve lost God's perfect world. Sin came with a price. **"For the wages of sin is death."** Over thousands of years Satan perfected his art of temptations.

God didn't leave his world or destroy it. He gave a promise. He would send a Savior to rescue it. That Savior was Jesus. Everything was now set for the "mother of all battles." Satan was at war with Jesus. He would use every opportunity to tempt Jesus to sin. Jesus came to restore what Adam and Eve had ruined. Satan knew that. This wasn't any "secret" mission that Jesus was on. It was a mission that God had planned and predicted for a very long time. **"Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil."**

While Jesus was in the desert, Luke tells us: **"He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry."** Like any good commander on a battlefield, Satan waited for an opportune time to tempt Jesus. He waited till Jesus was at his weakest point in the desert. In the same way, he looks for weaknesses in us. Then Satan comes along and tries to get us to doubt God's care for us. **"The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." It doesn't sound all that bad does it? He was hungry. I have trouble if I miss a meal or two in just one day. I can't imagine not eating for 40 days. As a result of his human nature, Jesus was weak. Satan knew that and went after it.**

Satan attacks us at our weaknesses. We all have them. We know what they are. If it is worrying, he will throw all kinds of things into our path that will cause us to worry. If it is hatred, he will give us all kinds of opportunities to hate people. If it is selfishness, he will place all kinds of toys in our life. Jesus didn't let Satan get his way. **"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'"**

If Satan doesn't succeed in one temptation, he will throw another one in front of us. He will change direction with the next temptation. **"The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours."** In this temptation, Satan just outright lies to Jesus. The world was not his to give away. He knows who is standing there in front of him. This is the Creator of heaven and earth. God made this world. He wants us to think that life is better without God. It worked in the Garden of Eden. He said to Adam and Eve – God's keeping something from you. Here's a way that you can get what he doesn't want to give to you. He dangled the fruit in front of them. They took it. Jesus didn't. **"It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"**

The Devil comes at Jesus a third time. **"The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'** "Every time that Satan tempts us, we are at war with him. Do we always see the danger coming? Sometimes, by the time we see it, it's too late. But Jesus did – every single time.

Temptations are hard, aren't they? How do we fight those temptations in our life? There is no magic tool or a step-by-step instruction booklet. But he does give us a tool that will defeat him – God's word. Satan can't change what the Bible says. Jesus knew that. Why do you think he used God's Word defeat the Devil? Jesus didn't fail in his mission. At the end of the season of Lent, we see the Devil lose the battle. Easter Sunday will prove the payment is made.

Satan left Jesus, for now. **"When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time."** The fight against the temptations of Jesus weren't over. We know the outcome of the greatest war in the world. It will end at the cross. There on that cross of Calvary, Jesus will crush the head of Satan. Easter will prove that he was victorious. May you and I take comfort in Jesus' defeat of Satan. May we ask Jesus to help us fight against all that Satan will throw at us. Amen.