

Vicar Andrew Wolfgram

Text: Hebrews 4:14-15,

Date: March 8th, 2017

Setting: Our Redeemer Lutheran Church Lenten Midweek

Facing Temptation

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is easy to find fault in others isn't it? It can become easy to look and point the finger. "Why would you do that?" It sometimes becomes even easier to look back to our first parents and ask why they sinned. They broke the one rule that God had given them not to break. It seems easy to say, "You had ONE job, and you messed it up."

When we think about Adam and Eve being tempted in the Garden of Eden, we sometimes want to shake our heads and say, "How could they?" "How could they disobey their Lord in this wonderful paradise where all their needs were being taken care of. Where they were living in harmony with God and each other?" We might wish we could have looked Eve straight in the face when she was about ready to take a bite out of that forbidden fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and say, "Stop it!" But the truth is that we find ourselves in similar situations when we are tempted to do something to disobey God. We have disobeyed God, just as Adam and Eve did. We have disobeyed this God who has so lovingly given us everything we need on this beautiful earth.

We are reminded on this day that temptation is not a thing of the past. It's not something that we can cease to worry about anymore. It is something that is a part of our current sinful existence in the fallen world, and it is something we must face head-on.

We, too, like Adam and Eve, are drawn to what looks pretty. What is pleasing to the eye. Unfortunately we are drawn to what is ultimately not good for us spiritually and is not in line with what God desires for our lives. These things, they distract us from God and His plan for us.

The devil knows how to trip us up using these things. He knows our weaknesses. For some of us it is eating something we know we shouldn't, for others it is looking at something online we know is not healthy for us. Whatever it is that trips you up, put your guard up extra high.

True, there are some things that are easy to resist. They are easy for us to turn away from and say, 'No!' to. But other things keep our heads turning back and keep our eyes distracted. As you go about your day, your mind drifts back to that one sin you enjoy breaking. You perhaps think back to the last time you committed that sin, and pat yourself on the back for lasting that long. The devil whispers in your ear that it has been far too long since you have committed that sin. Go ahead and do it, it's ok, the devil says. And those are the things that we can try our best to keep away from this Lent. These temptations.

Specifically committing to giving up chocolate or the Internet during these forty days of Lent is one very good way to approach it. Another way is to come up with a strategy for dealing with temptations when they come our way, no matter what they are. When we are drawn to look at something tempting, for example, have a Bible close at hand to look at and read instead of engaging in the temptation before you.

Or when tempting thoughts start entering your head, you might also want to have a list of happy, holy thoughts that you can ponder instead. Times you felt close to God. Or perhaps you could think about a favorite hymn or people who have helped you in your faith. A guiding principle in making a list like this is to consider the words of Philippians 4:8-9: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me— practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Living with these thoughts in our minds and dwelling on the fact that the God of peace is with us always have the added benefit of helping us resist the urge to fall into temptation. Our focus has shifted from us and our needs to God and what he desires and what we can do to bring glory to him.

But for the times when temptations do creep into our lives, even at our strongest periods of faith, we know we have our Savior, Jesus. Jesus, who can provide us with the strength we need to emerge victorious from any battle we might have with Satan. We are reminded of the words of Hebrews 4:15-16, which say, “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” His triumph over the devil becomes our triumph today because of the cross. It is Christ’s death on the cross, even more than his resistance to temptation in the wilderness, that strips Satan of the power of his tricky, tempting ways. Because of the cross, we have the confidence of knowing that the power of Jesus is within us to face

temptation and we will come out as winners.

There is no longer a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness when it comes to dealing with temptation, because the death of Christ has done away with its hold on us. Because of Christ, it becomes easier and easier for us to turn away from temptation and move on. So move on and move away from the wiles of Satan, and be energized in your ability to live a life that is superimposed with the cross.

A life superimposed with the cross is a life that is filled with trust in the power of the cross. A life that is focused on Jesus and not on oneself. A life that considers the desires of life on earth not worth comparing to the life yet to come in heaven, where the triumph over the devil will be complete and secure forevermore. Amen.

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine... to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen."

Ephesians 3:20-21