

Pastor Daniel Iwinski

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First Sunday in Lent

St. Paul's (WELS) Moline, IL

3:8

War!

I. *For Jesus*

A. *The reality of the war.*

B. *The nature of the war.*

C. *The result of the war.*

II. *For Us*

A. *The reality of the war.*

B. *The nature of the war.*

C. *The result of the war.*

Luke 4:1-13

Later today we will be including in our prayers the members of our Armed Forces, especially those who are in harms way in Afghanistan.

For me the war is so far removed from my day to day activities that sometimes I need to even be reminded that there is a war going on in the world and that our own people are in the midst of it. Sometimes it is hard to keep remembering the war. It does not change my schedule, it does not change my lifestyle and to date I have not had anyone very close to me personally who has been asked to go into combat.

I have one brother-in-law who serves in the United States Air Force who is currently living in the State of Washington and I also have a cousin whom I am very close to who is an officer in the United States Navy and he is serving in Baltimore, Md. Today we are reminded of another war, one in which all of us are fighting on the front lines.

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. If you step back and look at the Gospel readings for the Sundays in Lent you will see that they cover the entire ministry of Jesus; however, when you look at them sequentially you see that the common theme for the season and what brings them all together is each Sunday is a step Jesus takes closer to His cross. Each one shows Jesus drawing ever closer to the very reason He was born of Mary: to die for our sins. Jesus came to fight and win the war against sin and that is exactly what He did.

The war is raging, in today's Gospel. Shortly, almost immediately after Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan river, Jesus went into the desert for a period of forty days during which He did not eat. Why did Jesus do this? Why did Jesus do this at the very beginning of His ministry?

Jesus came to seek and to save what was lost; Jesus came to save the world from its sins. This was a very real, very needed battle and Jesus won the battle solely through His death, and resurrection to new life.

Jesus could win the battle only because He was God in the flesh. Had Jesus not been God His one death could not have paid for everyone's sins: **"No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him."** (Psalm 49:7). Had Jesus not incarnated and become a man He simply could not have died for anyone's sins because God could not die. This leads us to an important question: If Jesus was truly God and man then could He really

struggle, feel pain or truly even suffer?" The answer to this question is at the very heart of who we believe God is and what it took for us to be saved.

Anything short of denying Jesus' humanity is to deny Jesus altogether: the denial is a rejection of Christmas, and God's work of salvation. When Jesus took on humanity, being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary Jesus became fully and truly human. It is this key truth that is confessed by us especially in the Nicene Creed. Listen closely to what we confess: "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ...[who] for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became fully human."

If Jesus had not lived a perfect life then He could have removed our sins but He could not have clothed us with the righteous life we now have in Him. This is the second part of the "great exchange" that sometimes we don't focus enough attention on. The great exchange is that Jesus removes our sins from us and pays for them on the cross and He clothes us with the righteous life He lived in the flesh. This has everything to do with Jesus going into the wilderness and being tempted by the devil for forty days and nights.

What reality did Jesus experience at that time? First, Jesus was truly hungry; He had a human body which needed nourishment and the desire to eat was a real one and not a fake feeling. Why did Jesus undergo this? He did it to fulfill all righteousness. Only here in this vulnerability could Jesus thoroughly overcome all and every temptation from the devil. Luke now shows us the nature of those temptations.

When Luke tells us that Jesus "was tempted" the words really mean that Jesus underwent a constant ongoing temptation during this period. It was not as if the period of temptation and trial came and went at different times (though their nature changed during this period) but was constant and relentless.

It was the devil specifically that tempted Jesus. This incident is recorded also in the Gospel of Matthew; an interesting note here is that there is a different ordering of the temptations: for Matthew they are recorded chronologically with Jesus being tempted to turn stone into bread, then taken to Jerusalem at the temple and finally taken to a high place and shown the kingdoms of the world. Luke doesn't go with that ordering; instead, Luke concludes with Jesus being tempted in Jerusalem emphasizing the theological importance God's power to save.

All three temptations of the devil to Jesus are to undermine and undo one's relationship to God. In the first temptation--turning stones into bread--is to get Jesus to doubt God the Father's provisional care. What was the devil really focusing on? Jesus you are hungry, more, you deserve to eat. Take things into your own hands and feed yourself. Don't look to your Father or anyone else but provide for yourself. What was Jesus' response? **"Man does not live on bread alone?"** (verse 4).

We must remember who led Jesus into the wilderness? It was the Spirit. For what purpose? To be tempted, and to overcome temptation, to give this life

of righteousness to the people of God. What Jesus was doing was showing that the preeminence of life is to follow God and place one's self totally in His care and guidance. Jesus succeeded. The devil of course would not stop there.

In the second temptation the devil takes Jesus to a high place and promises Jesus all the kingdoms of the world only if Jesus would bow down. What was Satan promising? He was promising a cross-less, gift of the world. The problem is obvious that Satan was offering a gift that wasn't his to even give. Such is how he works. In the same way Satan offered to Eve the knowledge of God only if she would partake of the forbidden fruit. When Eve did so she reaped only pain and suffering and not anything resembling godliness or knowledge of God.

Finally, Satan takes Jesus to Jerusalem with the words: **"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here."** (verse 9). After all won't your Father send angels to protect you as the psalms promise? (As spoken of in Psalm 91.) Here too Jesus overcomes the devil with the power of the word: **"Do not put the Lord your God to the test."** (verse 12).

In all three attempts Satan failed, Jesus prevailed. Jesus was totally obedient to His Father and placed all His trust in Him. Jesus did not eat though He truly hungered those forty days. In so doing He filled all righteousness. Jesus refused to take the easy route knowing full well that the devil was offering something he was unable to give anyways. Finally Jesus never doubted in His mission of salvation for the world. Jesus would lay down His life in Jerusalem but He would lay it down willfully, purposefully for the whole world. Then and then only would Jesus lay down His life only to take it up again.

Jesus succeed in every temptation and His righteousness is what is given to us by God. Jesus succeeded. The question now is do we need to succeed? After all Jesus did everything, everything we cannot do so isn't the fight for us just a cosmetic one? In other words don't we just go through the motions of looking like we struggle all the while smiling to ourselves that not of our struggles really matter because Jesus did it all anyway? Do we have anything to lose or gain by fighting against the devil in our own lives?

The short answer is yes, we do have something to gain and to lose in this fight. No we cannot win our salvation: our works are not taking us to heaven in any way because only Jesus' works can do that. However, Jesus does remind us that faith can be lost. The truly sad fact is that while the devil is not powerful enough to snatch anyone from God's hand, sometimes he is smart enough to get people to simply walk away from God.

Jesus reminds us that there are those who **"receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away."** (Luke 8:13). The time of testing may be something intense, fierce and difficult but the time of testing may also be long, silent, and quiet.

Just as Jesus was tempted by the devil in a special way over this period of forty days we too are tempted every day by our own sinful flesh and the evil of

the world. The temptation is relentless this side of heaven and that is why Jesus calls us to action and to faith every day. (We do well to remember that special prayer Jesus gave us--the Lord's Prayer--which is a daily prayer.)

True the devil will not attack each one of us in exactly the same specific way because we are all different with different strengths and weaknesses; however, there is a pattern that is the same for all of us.

The devil uses two basic attacks which are displayed in the three temptations of Jesus. The first temptation is to get people to doubt God's care. How does the devil do this? Most easily by getting people to doubt that God really does save, that salvation can be so accomplished that we only need believe and it is so. The devil would have the world believe it cannot be so easy that we must do our part and bring something to the table. Such thinking undoes everything Jesus does. We as a congregation, while always vulnerable to such an attack, are well prepared for this lie of the devil. Of course the devil won't stop so he comes at us another way.

Satan tempted Jesus by telling Jesus to throw Himself down off the Temple, after all God the Father would protect Him. Also, the devil offered to Jesus an easy way to the final goal: just bow down and worship me and I will give you all these kingdoms of the world. Do these temptations have anything to do with us?

The second way the devil tempts us is to have us overly comfortable in the gospel. Note: I did not say overly confident but rather overly comfortable. The devil knows that if one is strong in Jesus' simple promises of salvation then his best bet is to get people to take the gospel for granted and to use it as a blank check for their lives.

What does the devil say so often to us: "Oh, you don't need to go to church and hear the same old message again and again after all you know it all already." "Oh, why get so up tight about this or that action, you're not perfect and you cannot be perfect this side of heaven, so why fight it? Why even try?"

The devil tempted Jesus into making stones into bread so He could eat and no longer be hungry. In our own lives when we feel deprived the devil would have us doubt God's goodness and His care. There the devil is all to happy to have us sin and to give ourselves to sin, because after all we deserve it and we should be happy and satisfied with everything this side of heaven.

How do we overcome such opposition and tactics of the devil? First by daily remembering we are in a war, a spiritual war for ourselves and for our families. Second, by remembering Jesus' victory those forty days and the ultimate victory on the cross which can never be undone. The battle is real but the battle is won. Finally we overcome the opposition by listening to Scripture and like Jesus applying it to every situation we find ourselves in.

Today we come to the Lord's Table to receive His body and His blood that we may be fed and that we may be empowered in our daily fight against the devil. Jesus' journey continued after those forty days. Our journey continues too. Fight, listen, believe and live! Amen.

