

Mount Olive Lutheran Church  
5327 W. Washington Blvd.  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The First Sunday in Lent  
February 25, 2007  
Luke 4:1-13

*“Powerful Words”*  
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

It is of more than passing interest, that each year as the Lenten season begins, the Gospel lesson for the first Sunday in Lent focuses our attention on the temptation of Jesus. Last Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, we entered into this season of reflection and meditation. And almost on cue, the devil is standing in the way. Perhaps when the readings were developed for the church year, that thought was part of the reason for placing this account at the very beginning of Lent. In facing temptation, what power do we have to overcome it? The clear example of the Lord Jesus in our text for today gives us an answer. He conquered with the powerful word of God, and we have those “Powerful Words” to use as well. May the Lord bless us on this day as we hear His Word.

I. THE POWER TO OVERCOME TEMPTATION

The account of our Lord's temptation by the devil in Luke chapter 4 is just the end of a forty day temptation that he went through. The devil was fully on the attack in his attempt to turn our Lord away from his mission. Satan wanted nothing more than to defeat the will of God in Jesus' life. And so we read in these verses of his last three attempts. Each of these attempts is cunning and well planned yet each fails as Jesus turns to the power of the Word of God. In the first place, Satan would take advantage of Jesus' hunger. He was forty days in the wilderness without food, and so Satan says: IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD, COMMAND THIS STONE TO BECOME BREAD. Show your power as God's son, turn this stone to bread. Feed yourself and in the process show that you do not fully place your trust and reliance on the love of the Father. And Jesus replies with powerful words, the word of God, the Lord's revelation: IT IS WRITTEN: MAN SHALL NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE. No indeed, for man lives instead by the word which comes from God. Jesus revealed his trust in his Father.

The next temptation was far different: 5 AND THE DEVIL TOOK HIM UP AND SHOWED HIM ALL THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD IN A MOMENT OF TIME, 6 AND SAID TO HIM, "TO YOU I WILL GIVE ALL THIS AUTHORITY AND THEIR GLORY, FOR IT HAS BEEN DELIVERED TO ME, AND I GIVE IT TO WHOM I WILL. 7 IF YOU, THEN, WILL WORSHIP ME, IT WILL ALL BE YOURS." This temptation was also very bold and daring. Yet it was also rather foolish. Here is Satan offering to the king of kings and Lord of Lords his own creation, his own kingdom which already belongs to him, yet the promise is tantalizing. You can have all of this without the cross, without the pain, without death. Yet our Lord again simply put to rest the argument with the power of the word: IT IS WRITTEN, "YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND HIM ONLY SHALL YOU SERVE".

The devil tries one more time. This time he decides to use Jesus' own weapon. He quotes Scripture to him: AND HE TOOK HIM TO JERUSALEM AND SET HIM ON THE PINNACLE OF THE TEMPLE AND SAID TO HIM, "IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD, THROW YOURSELF DOWN FROM HERE, 10 FOR IT IS WRITTEN, " HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU, TO GUARD YOU,' 11 AND "ON THEIR HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, LEST YOU STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE." Amazing! But again it was a carefully thought out temptation. Prove yourself to be the Son of God, let the people below see as the angels protect you from certain death and God keeps you. You will be acclaimed as the Messiah in this great miracle. But interestingly, in quote Psalm 91, Satan left out an important phrase, "to keep you in all your ways" – He quotes, but he misquotes as well. Jesus again puts to rest the deceiving word of the devil. He does not call into question the fact that the Lord's angels do protect us and keep us, but he returns to the word and he sends the devil reeling: "IT IS SAID, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST". And the devil left him until an opportune time.

Jesus conquered the temptations of the devil with powerful words, God's word. What a powerful weapon we have also in that Word. It is a weapon by which we too can overcome temptation. When the devil would turn us away from God with thoughts of power and wealth, with dreams of grandeur, with the continuing whisper of the temptation of our first parents: YOU SHALL BE LIKE GOD, we too have the word of God which can be our strength and our source of power. As Martin Luther, writing "A Mighty Fortress" says:

Tho' devils all the word should fill,  
all eager to devour us.  
We tremble not, we fear no ill,  
they shall not overpower us.  
This world's Prince may still,  
scowl fierce as he will  
He can harm us none,  
He's judged the deed is done.  
One little word can fell him!

What powerful words indeed. The Word of God overcomes the devil.

## II. THE POWER TO SAVE

Secondly, the word of God has another power over the devil as well. It is the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to save us. In the epistle for today, St. Paul in the tenth chapter of Romans quotes from the Old Testament several times when he reminds us that "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART" (THAT IS, THE WORD OF FAITH THAT WE PROCLAIM); 9 BECAUSE, IF YOU CONFESS WITH YOUR MOUTH THAT JESUS IS LORD AND BELIEVE IN YOUR HEART THAT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, YOU WILL BE SAVED. (Romans 10:8-9) The Lord Jesus who overcame the temptation of the Evil

One in the wilderness did far more for us than just that. He also overcame the devil on the tree of the cross.

Last Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, we entered into the Lenten season. During this special time of the year we recall our Lord's steadfast walk to the cross for us. We remember his suffering, his death, and his glorious resurrection. We hear during this holy season again the teachings of the Word of God which speak of him as Servant, as Savior, as Lord. And we confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, our Lord, our Savior from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. And the word of God powerfully saves us. It points us to Jesus Christ. He is the center and the heart of the Scriptures. As St. Paul wrote to young Timothy: FROM A CHILD YOU HAVE KNOWN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES WHICH ARE ABLE TO MAKE YOU WISE UNTO SALVATION THROUGH FAITH WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS. (II Tim. 3:16) As our Lord himself reminded those around him: YOU SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES, FOR IN THEM YOU THINK THAT YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE, AND THEY ARE THEY WHICH TESTIFY OF ME. There is salvation in the word of God for it is the power of God which works faith by the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ. And that is our hope and our joy as we trust in him. That is our promise of everlasting life.

### III. THE POWER FOR OUR LIVES

Finally, let the word of God be a power in your life. Let the "IT IS WRITTEN" spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ stand as a motto in all your ways and thoughts. Tragically, we live in an age when the Word of God is often ridiculed or denounced or just plain ignored. There are many who regard it as a nice collection of old stories or as an example of an outmoded way of life. There are even Christian scholars who spend more time tearing that Word apart and dissecting it than listening to it. Thank God for the faithful witnesses to the Word of God that remain in this world. That there are people who are not ashamed to speak the "THUS SAYS THE LORD" and to humbly bow in awe and obedience before the Word of God; who state with assurance in faith that it is the inspired and inerrant Word of God; who say simply, IT IS WRITTEN. It is not our task to tear it apart, to subject it to our own reason or understanding. Rather we should as the old prayer suggests: READ, MARK, LEARN, AND INWARDLY DIGEST IT. Make the Word a part of your lives. Take the opportunity to study it. When we express concern for those who are not in worship regularly, we do so because they are losing access to the powerful word. Pray fervently that the Lord may continue to bless us with his gracious presence in the Word and in the Sacraments and that we ourselves may not despise them but grow in grace and love toward one another through that Word. Our Lord has given us His Word as the means of his grace, as the power, as the source, as the strength of our lives. Thank God for his Word. Thank God for the power of that Word. It is a power far greater than all the forces of hell combined. It is power for eternity.

### Conclusion

As I looked at the words of this text and at the comments of several theologians, I was struck by an interesting thought on the last reply of Jesus to the third temptation by the devil. "You

shall not put the Lord your God to the test." At first glance, it is very much the response of someone who is asked to do something foolish, like jump off the pinnacle of the temple, to prove that God is faithful. But there might well be another meaning in those words as well.

What if those are the words which Jesus addressed to the devil himself: "You, Satan, shall not put the Lord your God to the test." For they are most certainly true in that sense. For Jesus is the Lord God, the Son of God, the Messiah. No one else could use those words in that way, save the Lord Himself. Sometimes the argument is not won with clever phrases and well crafted words, often it is won with the truth. In this instance it was won with the truth of the Lord's own word. And that is how it must continue to be won today—with the truth of the Lord's own word.

Jesus Christ, be Thou our Stay  
Oh let us perish never!  
Cleanse us from our sins we pray  
And grant us life forever.  
Keep us from the Evil One;  
Uphold our Faith most holy,  
And let us trust Thee solely  
With humble hearts and lowly.  
Let us put God's armor on,  
With all true Christians running  
Our heavenly race and shunning  
The devil's wiles and cunning.  
Amen, Amen! This be done;  
O Lord, have mercy on us.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.