

10 February 2008  
Lent 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“One Huge *Victorious* Man”

Text: Matthew 4:1-11 (Romans 5:12-19; Genesis 3:1-21)

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

Jesus sees temptation and sin for what it really is. And so He is not seduced by temptation, but resists it. He does not give in to sin, thinking that it will not harm Him, because He knows all sin is harmful – from those really big “whoppers” all the way down to the little white lies we tell. He sees what we don’t. And so He resists, while we fall and, let’s be honest, even welcome and enjoy sin.

And so part of our Lenten discipline and learning is to help us see sin rightly. To see its danger. And for that, we need the Word of God. The Word made flesh to show us, and the Word given to us and implanted in heart and mind to enable us to resist and fight. Because on our own, we cannot do it. On our own, we are easy pickin’s.

And so part of our Lenten discipline and learning is to understand that what we do is not just what we do, but reflects who we are and what we believe. Sin is not mindlessly doing what we’re not supposed to do or not doing what we are supposed to do, because sin is not primarily a matter of the mind – but of the will, or the heart. Our sin reveals where we have put our faith and trust and confidence; who and what we look to for every good and for what we need. Or in other words, sin doesn’t *cause* our unbelief and idolatry, but *reveals* it.

And so part of our Lenten discipline and learning is to realize that temptations are not always what they seem. A temptation to turn stones into much needed bread seems like a pretty harmless temptation in the grand scheme of things. But a temptation to bread is not just about bread, but about trusting in our Father to provide all that we need. Do we trust that our Father is good and will take care of us and all our needs, as He promised? Or do we take matters into our own hands? Deciding that we *need* to sin on order to get what we need, in order to get ahead, in order to get what I think I have coming. Because there is no other way. For God

can not or will not or is waiting too long. . . . **And so where is your faith?**

A temptation to throw yourself off the pinnacle of the temple seems a bit more adventuresome than bread, but here too the temptation is not what it seems. For while satan couches the temptation in terms of testing *Jesus'* faith, Jesus sees that it is really a matter of testing God – that *God* prove Himself faithful and reliable. This is the very opposite of faith, which does not take God at His Word and believe what He has said, but demands to *see*. That demands from God *evidence* of His love and truthfulness. And this is a powerful seduction, to believe what is seen instead of what is unseen. To believe that *if* God loves me then He will do . . . then He will give . . . then He will help me . . . *what?* **And so where is your faith?**

And then there is that third temptation of Jesus . . . which, well, seems rather silly at first, doesn't it? For how could satan expect Jesus to fall down and worship him? Especially after his first two attempts failed. It seems rather *obvious*. But again, temptation is not what it seems. For with this temptation, satan strikes at the heart of it all – *of who holds first place in your heart?* And the question is not whether it is God or satan – that's too easy! It is whether it is God **or you**. What drives what you do? What drives what you say? What drives what you think, and what you desire, and what you will? If the answer is not your Father in Heaven, then you have done this very thing. **You are an idolater.**

Harsh? Maybe. Truth? Yes. And so repent. And realize that satan doesn't tempt you to sin in order to give himself something to do, or just because he likes to laugh at you. He is doing it all to destroy you. One sin at a time. That each and every sin eat away at your faith, cause you to doubt, and to put your faith and trust, your joy and delight, in anything and everything except God. Because he wants you to die – not only now, but eternally. Satan is the wolf in sheep's clothing; the angel of darkness disguised as an angel of light; the Trojan Horse that seems harmless, until he gets in and unleashes his army against you.

And so today, as part of our Lenten discipline and learning, it is important to see this true nature of sin and its danger, to see our own weakness and helplessness, so that most importantly, **we see the One who has come to fight for us**. Who has stepped onto the battlefield in our human flesh and blood to do what we are unable to do – fight satan and win. To see through his temptations, his deceptions, and his seductions. To look straight into the jaws of the serpent, to feel his hot breath and smell its deathly stench, and put him down. First in the wilderness, and then on the

cross. Plundering his kingdom and rescuing us from his deadly grip. For on the cross our Saviour took our place in the jaws of sin and death, to be the sacrifice in our place, to enter death, and in His resurrection from the dead pry open the jaws that have snapped closed on us, and set us free. And so we see the power of the Word of God.

But which Word, you may be asking in your mind right now. The Word made flesh that fought for us in the wilderness, or the Word of God that has been given to us? To which I reply: *spurious alternative!* For the Word of God made flesh that fought for us in the wilderness is the Word of God now given to us, that is still fighting for us through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. There are not two Words, but one Word; and not two battles, but one battle. And just as in the wilderness, on the cross, and through the empty tomb, so too today, the Word is victorious. The battle there won is the victory now applied and given to us today. Given every time a child, teen, or adult is baptized; given every time your sins are forgiven; given every time you eat the body and drink the blood of your Saviour. Each and every time those gifts are given the mighty hand of God is prying open the jaws of satan, casting him down, and giving you life.

And not only that, but now also gifting you His Spirit, that you see aright. That you see the lies, the deceptions, and the seductions of sin, that satan makes to look and sound so good and right. To strengthen you and guide you and enable you to resist the tempter. To work in you what you cannot do on you own. *For you are no longer on your own!* You are baptized! You are fed! You are forgiven! You are sons and daughters of God! You are not in the wilderness of this world alone, but now live in Christ and Christ in you.

And so yes, **In Adam we have all been one huge rebellious man.** (LSB #569) But now in Christ, **we are all one huge victorious man.** (Rom 5) Satan has now no power over us. His defeat of Eden has now itself been defeated, and our Saviour has opened Paradise again, and provided for us the fruit of the tree of life, that we may eat of it and live. And for this fruit we need not wait, but come and receive **today.** For it is the cross that is now our tree of life, and our Saviour's very body and blood the fruit of which we eat and live. His life, His forgiveness, His victory, given to us here. That the bitterness of our sin be overwhelmed and overcome by the sweetness of His forgiveness.

And so part of our Lenten discipline and learning is learning *to fix our eyes on Jesus.*

(Gradual) That we repent of who we are, and rely on what He is. For He is the *founder* of our faith, the *perfecter* of our faith, and the *goal* of our faith. And clinging to Him our faith is right, we need not fear, and our victory is assured.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.