

Matthew 4:1-11; Genesis 3:1-21

1st Sunday in Lent

The Cross is: The Answer to Temptation

March 1, 2020—Shepherd of the Mountains, Pinetop, AZ

INI

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, if you were to draw a traditional 3D block representation of the cross and start counting, you would find that it has 14 surfaces. One on the front, one on the back, and then 12 other surfaces among the various parts of the sides, tops, and bottoms. This works out quite well for us, since during this 40-day journey through Lent, along with the Sundays scattered in it, there are 14 services—14 opportunities for us to look at what the cross is and what it means for us.

On Ash Wednesday we saw the cross as a symbol. That somber shape, that symbol, marked our foreheads in ashes reminding us of the wages of sin, reminding us that we are all dust and to dust we shall return. You could say that the cross is the symbol of both Law and Gospel. The Law aspect shows that the cross is the symbol of God's judgment of all of our sin. And the Gospel aspect shows that this same shape is the symbol of our reconciliation and the price that was paid to earn it. Today, our look at the cross shows us that the cross *is not* a "how to manual." The cross is the answer to temptation.

Our OT reading starts nearly in the beginning. Satan comes along and asks the question. "**Did God actually say...?**" And from Eve's response, which varied slightly from what God originally told Adam, we can tell that his question had done its job. She was questioning God's Word. You know the rest of the story. She gave in. She ate. She gave some to her husband and he also ate. And then came death. Then came judgment. Then came the curse from God on all creation.

But before we start pointing the finger at Eve, we need to remember that Adam was the one to whom God had originally spoken the command, before Eve was even created. Adam was the original steward of God's Word, entrusted with proclaiming it to his spouse and eventual offspring. Adam was right there next to Eve when Satan tempted them to question God's Word. Adam should have stepped in and protected Eve from the devil's lies. But he failed. And so that first Adam is the one to whom the blame always falls in scripture, because Adam did not do his job. And so, **sin came into the world through one man...and death spread to all men.** Romans 5:12

Our Gospel reading for today stands in stark contrast to that Genesis account. Matthew picks up in chapter 4 right after Jesus' baptism. This is the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He had just, in a sense, been declared "very good" by the Father as the Spirit descended and remained upon Him and the Father said, "**this is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.**" The New Adam was on the stage, and it was time to get to work.

Right after the baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness. And it wasn't just to get away from the people like Jesus would do sometimes later. This going into the wilderness had a purpose. The reading tells us that the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, *led* Jesus into the wilderness *in order that/with the purpose that* He be tempted by the devil. Jesus went into the wilderness to fulfill all righteousness, to be what Israel of old was supposed to be, to strive against temptation, and to prevail in faith.

Jesus, fully God, yet also *fully Man*, was hungry after fasting for 40 days and nights. And along comes that old serpent, the accuser, the tempter, Satan himself. And he is using the same old tricks. "Did God *actually* say...?" God the Father had just declared Jesus to be His beloved Son, and yet Satan comes along questioning it. "**If you are the Son of God...**" *then do this and do that. If you are, then prove it. Show your glory. After all, God won't mind if you merely make some food for yourself. God won't mind if you show your glory by commanding the angels and letting everyone see your power.*

Just like near the beginning, Satan tried to twist God's Word to his purposes. But this wasn't Adam. This was the New Adam, the Son of God, the Word of God in the flesh. He would not give into temptation. Relying on God's Word, Jesus fought back and won, even against the temptation to be given authority of everything that was in Satan's current grasp. Because Jesus did not come to rule with might and power and glory...not yet.

Now one *temptation* for us is to look at this reading as an example of how to live. Don't be like the first Adam of Genesis 3. Do be like the Second Adam whom we see in the NT. We want to look at this as a sort of long-hand version of "WWJD," as a model of how a Christian should live. We sometimes get the idea that if we just know the right verses to quote, if our memory work has held up from way back in our confirmation days, we can triumph over any temptation. The problem with this is that we focus, as we often do, on our own efforts. If we could do that what Jesus did, if we could fulfill all righteousness by simply pulling out a handful of verses when temptations came, then there would have been no need for the Son of God to come. But we can't. We can only cling to Jesus and His promises and His cross.

Jesus' whole life, in a sense, was a cross to bear. As He made His way to the actual cross, He was tempted many times. Satan, the religious opponents, even His disciples at times tempted Him not to complete His mission. They all tempted Him to show His glory, to show His power, to give proof, to exalt Himself. It would have been easier for Him. It would have been so much simpler to show all the time that He while He was fully man, He was also fully God. But that was not His mission. His mission was to glorify the Father, not Himself. His mission was to remain humble. When He did use His power, it was for the benefit of the people, not Himself, for the glory of His Father who sent Him, not His own.

That same temptation was constant. While here at the beginning of His ministry it came from Satan himself, the temptation remained. Even after a lifetime of bearing this cross, as He was accomplishing His mission on the actual Cross of Golgotha, the temptation remained. **"If you are the Son of God..."** the people said as they passed by Him, as He hung there for them and for you, as He bled there for them and for you. **"If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."** Matthew 27:40 But the cross was the answer to temptation. And so, He remained there, obedient to the point of His righteous death on the cross.

Paul tells us **"For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."**

Satan doesn't want you to believe this. And he is going to continue to tempt us. And it's the same bag of tricks "did God actually say...?" because Satan wants you to give in to the belief that you are not saved, that your sins are too great, that you gave in to temptation too many times to be forgivable, that you are not really a child of God. But the answer to that temptation, to that question of "did God actually say...?" is the cross. Yes, God really said it. **"He shall crush your head, and you shall bruise His heel."** And on the cross, fulfilling all righteousness, yes, the Son of God actually said, **"it is finished."**

Jesus came, this word fulfilling,
Trampled Satan, death defiled;
Bore the brunt of our temptation,
On the wretched tree He died.
Yet to life was raised victorious;
By His life our life supplied. LSB 521 vs 4 Amen.