

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Midweek Lent 6 – April 5th, 2017

Mark 14:32-38 and Luke 22:45-46

³² They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³ He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. ³⁴ “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”

³⁵ Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

³⁷ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? ³⁸ Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Luke 22:45-46

⁴⁵ When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. ⁴⁶ “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”

Dear people in God's Kingdom

In the 1980s millions of Americans laughed at the “Church Lady” on *Saturday Night Live*. She was quick to blame bad behavior on “Hmmm . . . Who could it be? Satan?!” A decade earlier, comedian Flip Wilson loved to use the line “The devil made me do it!” I remember the old Bugs Bunny cartoons that always seemed to have a little angel on one shoulder and a little devil on the other. Almost 2,000 years earlier still, St. Paul proclaimed, not on prime-time television but on the pages of Holy Scripture: **“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind” (1 Co 10:13)**. Comedians and apostles are in agreement: temptation is a fact of life.

Temptation. It has been with us since that awful day in Eden when our first parents traded in their righteousness for a bite of forbidden fruit. It rears its ugly head on a daily basis down to this very day. Perhaps the comedians are on to something. It certainly is easier to laugh about temptation than it is to resist it! We laugh, but deep down we know that temptation is no laughing matter. The laughing face (all too often!) hides a guilty heart and sobbing soul.

No temptation has overtaken us except what is common to mankind. But am I the only one here who wonders whether or not we might be living in an age of uncommonly awful temptation? We pray “Lead us not into temptation.” But looking around our world, do you ever wonder if God is still listening to that petition? Just take a quick tour through a few commandments:

We are to remember the Sabbath Day, yet only 1 in 5 Americans attends a house of worship every weekend. And that number is getting worse every year. We are to honor our father and

mother, yet that can be tricky when roughly half of our nation has a father and a mother AND a stepfather and stepmother and perhaps a second stepmother and now mom's new boyfriend. Honor them? What is a child supposed to do? We are to keep ourselves from adultery, yet a 12-year-old child with a mobile device is just a click or two away from Internet content that would make David and Bathsheba blush.

I could go on, but I won't. You get the picture. Temptation is no laughing matter. It is a matter of life or death! As long as we live in this world, we live on the devil's turf. Temptation is *all around* us. As long as we have a body, we live with a sinful nature. Temptation is *within* us. Until that day when Christ comes to judge the living and the dead, the devil will never tire of tempting us. His fury is great, for his time is short! Satan's temptations will not stop. Where should we turn for help in temptation? Our Lenten series gives us the one real solution:

Theme: Repent! Turn To Jesus When You Face Temptations

- 1. The devil never stops tempting**
- 2. We need to watch and pray**

Turn to Jesus when you face temptation. Why? Jesus knows all about temptation! The water from his baptism was barely dry when St. Mark wrote: **“At once the Spirit sent [Jesus] out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan” (Mk 1:12,13).**

For forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, Jesus went toe-to-toe with the devil. The wild animals prowled in the desert darkness. The devil was prowling in the darkness too. The devil had three very special temptations that he wanted to share with Jesus. Soft. Subtle. Bold beyond belief! He tempted Jesus' belly—make these stones into bread. He tempted Jesus to put the Father to the test by taking a flying leap off the pinnacle of the temple. He tempted Jesus to forsake the Father's saving plan by giving the devil his due by bowing down to worship him. The whole world would belong to Jesus! Think about it. Satan is bold enough to tempt the very Son of God. In his temptations, he is brazen enough to use God's Word against the Word made flesh. His singular purpose was to derail God's plan of salvation before it ever left the station.

³³ **He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.** ³⁴ **“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”** ³⁵ **Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.** ³⁶ **“Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”** Jesus knows all about temptation. Satan was there at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the desert. He was there still tempting Jesus on the final night of his ministry in Gethsemane's garden, tempting Jesus, again and again, to flee from the Father's saving plans. His temptations were different this time. No longer were they soft, sweet, and subtle. Now Satan was tempting Jesus with raw fear! The fear of complete rejection by his followers and even his Father. Terror at the thought of the next day's torture. Dread at the thought of his coming death. Utter horror at the literal hell he was about to suffer. Gut wrenching disgust at the thought of drinking the contents of the cup he would gulp down. Jesus prayed earnestly for the Father to take the cup from him.

What's so bad about a cup? That depends on what's in the cup! So what is in the cup in Jesus' trembling hands? The rebellion of an Adam. The drunkenness of a Noah. The lies of an Abraham. The deceit of a Jacob. The adultery of a David. The greed of a Matthew. The denial of a Peter. The betrayal of a Judas. The murder of a Paul. All of it was in the cup. And more . . . The sins of my past that I am desperate to keep secret. They're in the cup! The thoughts in my head that would make Satan blush if beamed upon the front wall. They're in the cup. The words I've spoken to hurt others. They're in the cup. The deeds I've done to please myself and make others miserable. They're in the cup. What have you thought, said, or done today that's in the cup? And the One who knew no sin drank the cup and made these sins his very own.

Like three unholy peas in a pod, where you have sin there you also have sin's wages: death, judgment, and wrath. And right here we come face-to-face with the deep end of Christian truth! The Son of God, who is PURE HOLINESS, takes the world's sinfulness and makes it his very own. The eternal Son, who is LIFE, faces death by crucifixion. The Son, who is LOVE, who loves the Father with a perfect love and is loved by the Father with a perfect love, is now to be shown the backhand of the Father's wrath! Jesus is true God and true man. The thought of what was about to happen to him terrorized him as true man and revolted him as true God. In spite of it all, he remained perfectly pure and perfectly in tune with the Father's will. He prays, **“Abba, Father, . . . “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”**

Jesus turned to his Father in prayer. Temptation was trounced. The cup was drunk down to the very bottom. Jesus left the garden and carried his cross to the place of the skull. And there God condemned sin in the likeness of sinful flesh. In Christ, God's just judgment is perfectly served in his Son. Through Christ, we are served with mercy, forgiveness, and healing! In a garden, our first father, Adam, sinned and then ran. In a garden, Christ, our brother, remained holy and stood firm!

And, meanwhile, a stone's throw away . . . **“[Jesus] returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Simon,’ he said to Peter, ‘are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.’”**

Peter, James, and John had a special relationship with Jesus. They were the inner circle of the 12 disciples. They had seen amazing things. Peter, James, and John had been with Jesus when he raised up Jairus' daughter from the dead. It must have been an amazing sight when the little girl started to breathe again, stood up, and got the hug of her life from her parents! Peter, James, and John were there when Jesus was transfigured before their very eyes half a year before. It was a dazzling sight that was burned into their memories. The things they had seen and heard! In spite of all this, they were capable of saying some pretty amazing things. Remember when James and John sent their mother to ask Jesus to let them sit at Jesus' right and left in his heavenly kingdom? They assured Jesus that they too could drink the cup that Jesus would drink! Peter promised Jesus that even if everyone else fell away from him, he never would. Peter said he was willing to die for Jesus!

The ones who were willing to die for Jesus and reign with Jesus couldn't keep their eyes open to watch and pray with Jesus. Jesus had only asked one thing of them: **“Stay here and keep watch.”** Instead of being a source of comfort for Jesus in his humanity, they snored loudly—overcome with sorrow. Their heavy hearts and eyelids were proof that the flesh is weak! They did exactly the opposite of what Jesus

asked.

Watch and pray. Watch! How many trophy bucks are still safely roaming the woods of Wisconsin because a hunter's eyes became heavy? How many accidents have happened because someone took his or her eyes off the road and put them onto a phone for just a few seconds? How many millions of batters have struck out because, just for a split second, they took their eyes off the ball? Keeping your eyes open is important. How much more important it is to keep the eyes of your heart open and on the lookout for Satan's tricks! Procrastinating our life of worship . . . Dull listening to the Word . . . Laziness with holy living . . . Apathy in our life of prayer . . . Eyelids droop. Vision blurs. Souls go to sleep. Satan prowls closer and closer, circling for the kill! **“Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity” (Eph 5:14-16).**

Watch and pray. Pray! The flesh is weak, but—praise God the Holy Spirit!—our spirits are still willing. Turn to the Lord in prayer when temptation comes alluring! Turn to the Lord in prayer trusting two promises: (1) With God, all things are possible. He's stronger than Satan. He's tougher than temptation. (2) God's will will always be done. And what is God's will when it comes to temptation? He clearly reveals it: **“God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it” (1 Co 10:13).**

Without God's gift of prayer, the Judas in us would quickly betray, the Peter quickly deny, the John quickly sleep, the David quickly covet, and the Cain quickly kill. When the flesh trembles in weakness in the face of temptation, turn to Jesus—placing yourself completely in the hands of the One who triumphed over temptation. He has the strength and the will to keep you standing firm in times of temptation! Turn to Jesus with prayers of repentance. Rest your soul in the wounds of Jesus for forgiveness and healing for the times that our weak flesh has fallen!

Temptation is no joking matter. It rears its ugly head again and again, day in and day out. Martin Luther once said this about temptation: “You can't keep the birds from flying overhead, but you can keep them from building nests in your hair.” Turn to Jesus in times of temptation. Whenever you do, you are telling Satan's birds to go nest elsewhere. Never forget: Satan is good at tempting. The only problem for him is that Jesus is perfect at saving! Turn to Jesus. Only Jesus. Always Jesus! Amen.