

Matthew 4:1-11
Invocabit
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
March 6, 2022

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

In case you haven't realized it, there is a war going on. I'm not referring to any geopolitical disturbances in eastern Europe, although there's that too. I'm talking about the spiritual warfare we experience every day of our lives, from Baptism to the grave. The enemy is invading our territory and battles rage, sometimes here and sometimes there. Satan's temptation of Christ, which we hear about in our Gospel Lesson this morning, shows us what kind of war our leader fought on our behalf. Satan's temptation of Christ also shows us the kind of battles our enemy wages against us: a battle for our body and soul. The Devil tempts us with the cares of this world, ambition, and power. And just like our LORD Jesus Christ, the only way we can overcome the assaults of the Devil is with the only weapon we have: the Word of God.

To see the temptation of Christ and our own temptations as battles in a drawn-out spiritual war explains some of the other elements of our service this morning. Why would we sing "A Mighty Fortress"? Isn't that for Reformation Day? Yes, but "A Mighty Fortress" is also appointed as the hymn of the day for today, Invocabit Sunday, or the first Sunday in Lent. "A Mighty Fortress" is a battle hymn. We sing it today because we are engaged in battle against our enemy, the Devil. When we sing "A Mighty Fortress" on Reformation Day you might miss how militaristic the hymn actually is. We have so many associations with it that we forget it is a battle hymn. "A mighty *fortress*." "A trusty shield and weapon." "The valiant one fights for us." "Jesus Christ, of Sabaoth, Lord," that is, the leader of the heavenly armies. "He holds the field forever."

“He’s by our side, upon the plain . . . the victory has been won; the Kingdom ours remaineth.”
The entire hymn is about our ongoing warfare against the Devil and how Christ fights for us.

Another place in our service where we see the imagery of battle is the use of Psalm 91, which is sometimes referred to as “the soldier’s psalm.” All the parts of this morning’s service drawn from the psalms—the introit, the gradual, and the tract—all of them are taken from Psalm 91. There God is called a fortress. His faithfulness is a shield and a buckler, or a small shield. Though thousands and tens of thousands fall, the LORD will be with us. No plague will come near our tent, because the LORD of Sabaoth, the LORD of the heavenly armies, is with us. The battle imagery in Psalm 91 is unmistakable.

And then we come to the actual battle, our LORD Jesus Christ warring against Satan in the wilderness. Jesus had just been baptized by John in the Jordan River. Now He is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil, the slanderer of God’s people. Our LORD fasted forty days and forty nights. Important spiritual undertakings are often accompanied by a fast. For example, Moses fasted forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai while He was receiving God’s Law. Fasting is what we do during Lent, which as I mentioned on Ash Wednesday, in German is called “Fastenzeit,” the time of fasting. Lent is a time of fasting. It is a season of foregoing some of the pleasures of this life in order to concentrate more on our life with God.

So the Devil, the tempter, came to Jesus when He was most vulnerable, just as Satan always uses our weaknesses against us. After forty days and forty nights of fasting, Jesus was, of course, hungry. Satan fires the first shot: “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” Jesus is the Son of God. That much was proven at His Baptism, when the Father in heaven said: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Satan knew

Jesus was hungry and he tried to work that for his advantage. Satan tried to lead our LORD off the path that was laid out for Him, the way of self-denial, suffering, and death.

But Jesus answers: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Jesus thwarted Satan’s first attack using the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. He cites Deuteronomy 8:4, which says the LORD humbled the people of Israel by letting them hunger in the wilderness. Yet the LORD graciously fed the Israelites with manna, the bread from heaven. God did this to show the Israelites that man does not live by bread alone but by the Word of God. Man is both body and soul and must be fed in both body *and* soul. It is not enough to have all our physical needs met if we lack the Word of God. That’s one thing we learn while fasting. Life is more than food (Lk 12:22). It is the Word of God alone that gives life. Seek first the kingdom of God and the other things will fall into place.

The Devil could not tempt our LORD with food during this vulnerable time, so his second volley is directed at our LORD’s trust in God the Father. Satan tempts Jesus to tempt God. The Devil took Jesus to Jerusalem, to the pinnacle of the temple, and said: “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down.” Satan then cites Psalm 91, the soldier’s psalm: “He will command His angels concerning you . . . On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” Psalm 91 is about the LORD guarding His people in all their ways, protecting them as they do His will. But it is not the LORD’s will that we deliberately put Him to the test. Jesus responds with Deuteronomy 6:16: “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test.” The people of Israel tested God by questioning whether He was actually with them in the wilderness. God is with us and He directs our paths. To put His faithfulness to the test is simply a sign of unbelief.

In his last attack on our LORD in this battle, Satan shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and says: “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Our LORD’s kingdom is not of this world. Nations and empires come and go, but the Kingdom of God remains forever because it is an eternal kingdom. It is laughable that the Devil offers the King of kings and Lord of lords something so paltry as all the kingdoms of the world. Those kingdoms and much more already belong to Jesus. The kings of the earth bring their glory into the Kingdom of Christ (Rev 21:24). Jesus is on the throne ruling all things, upholding the universe by the word of His power. Again, Jesus counterattacks with the Word of God, Deuteronomy 6:13: “You shall worship the LORD your God and Him only shall you serve.” We worship the true God, not the false gods of those around us, and ultimately the demons behind those false gods. God’s Word is clear that we are to serve God alone.

Thwarted on every count, the Devil left Jesus, and angels came to minister to Him. Jesus won the battle and His army of angels came to serve Him. Of course, the temptation of Christ was just the beginning. The first skirmish was won, but the rest of the war still had to be waged. Satan continued pursuing Christ, tempting Him to depart from the course God had set out for Him (Matt 16:23), a course that would take Him through much suffering, and ultimately to death on the cross for the sins of the world. Even there, at our LORD’s crucifixion, we hear that Satanic plea: “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matt 27:40). This is where we see the true diabolical import of Christ’s temptation. All of Satan’s temptations were designed to distract Christ from the very purpose for which He became man. Christ overcame the assaults of the Devil so that He might die in our place. Satan would have prevented our LORD from atoning for our sins, but our LORD withstood the attacks and the onslaught of Hell. He stayed the course, suffering and dying for the sins of the world.

In the death of Jesus it seemed as if Satan had finally won the war, but we know otherwise. The death of Jesus was actually the final victory over sin, death, and the Devil. When Jesus rose from the dead, death was swallowed up in victory. That's why at Easter we sing, "The strife is o'er, the battle done; Now is the victor's triumph won!" The victory is already won, which gives us hope and strength as we continue fighting the battle. And so dear Christians, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the LORD, knowing that in the LORD your labor is not in vain. The battles you fight, the temptations of the Devil you overcome by the Word of God, all of that is for a purpose.

Your life is the life of Christ. Just like your LORD, the battle began when you were baptized. And like our LORD you are led by the Holy Spirit into situations where your faith is tested. By His own temptations, our LORD trains us for the battles we face as Christians. As our epistle lesson this morning tells us, "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). He Himself stays by our side upon the plain, upon the field of battle. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ used the Holy Scriptures to defeat the enemy. He battled with the same weapon we have, the written Word of God, which is the sword of the spirit. That's how He decided to destroy the works of the Devil then, and it's how He continues destroying the work of the Devil in our lives today. One little word can fell him. May we hold fast to the Word of God in whatever temptations and battles the Evil one throws our way, especially during the 40 days of testing this season of Lent. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.