

## *First Sunday in Lent*

February 21, 2010

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 4:1-13

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.*

Do you have a favorite super hero? Are you *Superman* fan? Perhaps you like *Batman* or *Spiderman* or *Iron Man*? Maybe, and I know this goes back a bit, you were a fan of *Wonder Woman* or the *Bionic Woman*? And of course, if I am going to ask about heroes, then I also have to ask about villains - because every good hero has one. Who are the scariest and most dangerous villains? My little Rachel, since Christmas, has a thing right now where a mention of the *Abominable Snowman* sends her running? What villains would you most fear? Would it be *Darth Vader*, *The Joker*, or *Lex Luther*? One thing for sure: there's no shortage of stories where it is hero verses villain, good verses evil.

We love these stories and the heroes in them, don't we? It is a wonderful thought that there could be someone to rescue us and usually right at the moment the need is most dire. It is nice to think about having someone who, when you need it the most, when you are helpless and have messed it all up, when you are in danger of losing it all, could sweep in and save the day.

Dear friends, today we are reminded that you and I have such a hero. But this is no comic book story or motion picture movie. This is a real life account. This is a battle between good and evil that is very real. There is a real villain who is scary and dangerous. But there is also a real hero - the greatest hero of all and One that we love most of all. This morning as we turn to God's Word I pray our eyes are opened to see: **A Real Hero over Villain Story.**

The scene for this encounter is set in the wilderness where Jesus was led after His baptism, which marked the beginning of His public ministry. Here comes Satan, our greatest villain, on the attack. The devil is relentless. For 40 days and nights he tempts Jesus - trying to cause Him to sin. The devil knows if he could get Jesus to sin, just once, he would win the victory. Here we see the cunning and craftiness of this villain as we are given three of his temptations.

In our first example, the devil uses a similar temptation he used to overcome the first man, Adam. He uses food. Remember Jesus had been out in the desert without food now for 40 days. The devil says to Jesus, "***If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.***" Like Satan did to Adam and Eve, he wants to shake Jesus' trust in God. He wants Jesus to take matters into His own hands. Two things the devil says Jesus can accomplish by

doing this, one, He can show off His power. *“Show me that you are the powerful Son of God. Since that is who we both know you are, prove it.”* Secondly, Jesus could satisfy His hunger. The devil wants Jesus to sin by showing a lack of trust in His heavenly Father to provide for Him. He wants Jesus to sin by having just an ounce of sinful pride by serving Himself with this miracle.

Since this villain is our villain too perhaps we should take note of his tricks. Satan is ready to jump all over a weakness. Jesus is hungry and the devil knew it. In the same way, the devil, just like most villains, comes after us when we are most vulnerable. He will attack when we are weak? When things are bad, the devil tempts us and tries to shake our trust in God. And when we start to feel strong, then the devil plays on our pride tempting us to take matters into our own hands. And what happens? We often fall for his deceptions, don't we? The villain defeats us.

In the second example, the devil takes Jesus to a high place (Matthew writes a very high mountain) and shows Jesus, in an instant, all the kingdoms of the world. Then, he says, *“I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.”* Doesn't this make us want to scream out, *“liar, liar”* at this father of lies? Just as Satan did to Adam and Eve in the Garden, he loves to lie and offer things only God has the authority to give. Satan knows Jesus came to redeem the world and the steep price it will take to do it. Jesus had ahead of Him terrible suffering and a dreadful death on a cross. So the villain tells our Hero to take the easy way out. *“Just quickly bow to me. No one else is even aware of it. Then all will be yours and you can avoid the horrible fate that is waiting for you.”* Yet, in reality Satan knows this short cut would be a dead end, not only for Jesus, but for the world.

Our villain also attacks us with flat out lies, and we fall for many of his lies. He says life will be so much better if we ignore or disobey God's commandments. He whispers to a frustrated wife that there is no way she can stay happy in her current marriage. He tells a business man there is no way he can get to the top by being honest. He convinces young people that it's not possible to keep their lives pure. He tells people that much wealth equals much happiness. He assures us a little lie or gossip never hurt anyone. He promises us countless things that are not his to give and tells us to take the easy road of sin. Our villain, more times than we would like to admit, succeeds in turning our attention and worship away from the true God. The villain defeats us.

In the third test Luke records, the devil even use God's Word in an attempt to attack and deceive. Satan takes Jesus up to the highest point of the temple. The historian Josephus writes the drop there was about 450 feet. Here the devil, approaches our Hero and says, *“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. For it is written, He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully.”* Satan tries fighting fire with fire so to speak. He quotes the Scriptures. These words seem to fit the situation. Satan asks Jesus to test God's saving power. Earlier Satan tried to shake Jesus' trust in the Father, but now he wants Jesus to prove that He trusts God. But this would be a false trust. The devil left out the words, *“he will guard you in all your ways.”* God's beautiful promise in Psalm 91 is an assurance of the Lord's protection as we go about our lives day to day. It is not a promise of unlimited angelic protection in all circumstances.

The devil uses the same deceptions to come at us. He uses God's Word. But he adds, subtracts, twists and turns God's Words in all directions. He pulls things out of context. He misuses and misapplies God's Word in order to create doubt in God's promises. Satan is crafty and cunning and he tricks us at times so that we misunderstand or doubt God's Word. The villain, once again, defeats us.

But not this time; not in this account! In this desert the results are much different, aren't they? Our villain meets his match. Our Hero steps in and saves the day. Did you notice the weapon Jesus used to win the victory? Our Hero uses the same powerful weapon God has given to us - His Holy Word. When Satan tried to get Jesus to prove Himself by using His power to take care of His own physical needs, Jesus simply quotes a verse from Deuteronomy, ***"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, (Matthew adds) but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*** Jesus trusts in God to take care of Him. More important to Jesus than proving Himself or filling His physical hunger was obeying God's Word & serving His Father. Our Hero defeats the villain.

When the villain lies and tries to get Jesus to bow before him. Jesus quotes again from Deuteronomy with a Bible verse that is fitting to use against any of the devils' attacks. Jesus answers, ***"It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"*** Our Hero defeats the villain.

When Satan attempts to turn the weapon of the Word against Jesus, the Hero is not fooled. Jesus, with one simple sentence from Deuteronomy, lets Scripture interpret Scripture: ***"It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*** Jesus trusts God's promises, but won't be fooled by promises God hasn't given. Satan is no match for Jesus and His Word. ***"When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time."*** The outcome is clearly decided. Our Hero defeats the villain.

We could say: *"Of course Jesus won, He is true God and all powerful and at any time could send the devil reeling."* But that's not what Jesus did. Our hero saved the day in a very unlike hero fashion. The Son of God didn't just step in and save us by His mighty powers. Instead, Jesus did not make full use of His power as God because while Jesus came to win the victory, He didn't come to win one for Himself. Instead, He sought to win the victory for us. That's why Jesus became fully human - our Hero became our substitute. He became weak and in our place Jesus was attacked by the devil and tempted in every way just as we are tempted, but, unlike us, He remained without sin. Jesus did so you and I could be clothed in His perfection. Our Hero came to win you and I the righteousness we need to live with God, here and eternally.

Then we also know what else our Hero did to save the day, don't we? It is our focus in Lent. Jesus not only lived perfectly for us, but He also died innocently for us! In the greatest example of Jesus setting aside the full use of the power that is His, for a time He let the villain do his ugliest. Jesus' heel would be struck by the devil as all sin would be placed on Him. Jesus suffered insult, pain, torture, punishment, and then death. But in that suffering and death on the cross, our Hero dealt our villain the crushing blow. The empty grave proves once and for all that our Hero is the Victor! This victory means everything for us. Our Hero bled and died so that all our daily defeats are washed away by His blood and we are forgiven. Our Hero gives us an eternal victory we will enjoy in heaven.

Dear friends, we have a real hero over villain story. Jesus saved the day for sure because He saved us from hell. And our hero is always close by and right here for us. Our Hero gives us the weapon we need to face the villain in our daily struggles - His Word. Do not be afraid children because now, with our Hero by our side, we too can send Satan fleeing. Amen.

