

The First Sunday in Lent – 2025

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Romans 10:8b-13

Luke 4:1-13

The bigger they come the harder they fall. Perhaps it's a cliché but Goliath was pretty big and he fell pretty hard. David had five smooth stones and a slingshot. One of those stones sunk deep into the giant's melon and then David took the bully's sword and detached Goliath's head from his shoulders. Israel had herself a king. Looking at the oversized champion of the Philistines it is easy to understand why so many of the Israelite warriors were shaking in their boots. David had simply had enough. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Samuel 17:26). It didn't seem like much of a match. Goliath was confident after sizing up David. The young shepherd lad was carrying his staff and Goliath sneered: "Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks?" (1 Samuel 17:43).

Have you ever felt overmatched? Was Eve overmatched? You realize that as a pastor I can only say what God's Word says. That is my vocation. Anytime a pastor attempts to unsay what God has said, or apologize for what God has said, or begin to write his own epistle to add to the canon of Scripture then that pastor has made a grievous error. God's Word says that after God was finished with His work of Creation, He saw that it was very good. "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day" (Genesis 1:31). That was a "good" Friday, the sixth day of creation. Adam and Eve were very good. Made in God's image, they loved God above all things and they loved their neighbor as themselves. And some time later, the serpent, the tempter, the devil entered the Garden. The Bible doesn't mention the origin of evil. God is NOT the source of evil. Satan had already been cast out of heaven. A usurper, he was bent on spreading pride, spreading rebellion and corruption. He lied. The good woman was tempted to eat, and she reached out her hand, took some of the fruit, and ate.

Perhaps you think that there is tension in that account. How could a perfect woman fall to the tempter's deceit? Why would she abandon the image of God if she was without sin? How could she be prompted by a lame promise of an elevated status if she was built to be obedient to God and His Word? The Bible doesn't say, and I can't speculate. It happened just the way it is recorded. She was perfect. Yet Eve was clearly vulnerable to Satan's lies. She took some of the fruit that she was commanded not to eat, and she ate. THAT is the catalyst for sin and death in this world. Adam too, ate. Satan won. And God planned to confront Satan personally in the desert. Let's get ready to rumble. It is a recapitulation, a do-over, a reprisal of the main event in the Garden of Eden. Only this time Jesus, true God and true man, is our champion, the new and greater Adam. Adam and Eve were tempted in a place where they had every advantage. Jesus would be tested under decidedly different circumstances.

How many of y'all believe that you perform admirably when you are tempted? Who here has mastered temptation? No one? Do you know how to defend yourself? Concealed carry licenses are all the rage in some places. The idea is to not be vulnerable to attack. Some folks who carry a concealed weapon do so in order that they may be of some use when the situation demands. Great. How many of y'all have devoted a reasonable amount of time to learning how to defend

yourself against temptation? Spiritual attack – do you believe that it is real? I believe that it is. “The old evil foe Now means deadly woe; Deep guile and great might Are his dread arms in fight; On earth is not his equal” (A Mighty Fortress Is Our God ~ LSB#656, st. 1). The Lord Christ meets this old evil foe on the battlefield. Humanity is in the balance.

The devil no doubt had sized up Jesus of Nazareth. Satan was probably confident. Every man had been subject to the devil’s wiles. Every man had proven himself to be corruptible. Satan had no doubt heard the Father’s voice at Jesus’ baptism: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). That’s going to be the devil’s angle. That will be the tempter’s hook. “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread” (Luke 4:3). Jesus is hungry. As the Son of man, He must eat. On another occasion, the Lord’s disciples urged him strongly, “Rabbi, eat. But he said to them, ‘I have food to eat that you do not know about.’ So the disciples said to one another, ‘Has anyone brought him something to eat?’ Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work’” (John 4:31-34). Jesus was radically faithful to His Father. He did not turn the stone into bread. “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone’” (Luke 4:4). Over and over, the Lord triumphs over temptation. Over and over and over, the incarnate Son of God triumphs over the serpent and his vanity, his pride, his greed and his lust.

You will fail. In some domain or another, you will fail. None of you are impervious to temptation. All of us are the same. We fail. To be sure, we are to strive. We are to be proactive and craft a preemptive defense against the attacks of the evil one. We are to recognize our vulnerabilities and marshal a preemptive defense against temptation. Five smooth stones could be five memorized passages that galvanize your spirit, that awaken humility and courage and trust and determination and hope. Five smooth stones could be five Christian friends with whom you share your vulnerabilities, who pray for you, who gladly ally themselves to you. “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve’” (Luke 4:8). That was a colossal victory! “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test’” (Luke 4:12). That is a smooth stone which Jesus flung at the devil. Christ’s aim is true. He did not fail. After fasting for 40 days, Jesus withstood the assault. That is your victory.

St. Luke tells us that “when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from [Jesus] until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13). Darkness had more rage to spend. When Peter spewed words straight from hell, Jesus knew what it was. “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men” (Matthew 16:23). As Judas left the Upper Room to go conspire with the chief priests on how to betray the Lord, St. John tells us ominously, “And it was night” (John 13:30). The opportune time was near. Jesus saw it coming. “This is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Luke 23:53). The rage and spite reached a fevered pitch as the Son of God hung triumphant on the cross. The faint echo of Goliath can be heard. “Am I a dog that you come at me with sticks?” “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matthew 27:40). “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him” (Matthew 27:42). Jesus is your innocent substitute and He endured all the temptation that the devil could muster. It was raw and painful and shocking and criminal and relentless. And through it all, Jesus was in control. Jesus suffered that onslaught and He was unwavering.

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46). When Jesus died, Satan fell hard. That was a “good” Friday.

Death is Satan’s weapon and Jesus used it to take off the serpent’s head. The Son of David defeats our enemy by allowing Satan to use his dread weapon against Him. Temptation was forever defeated as the dying Messiah cried out, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Remember that verse, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and accomplish His work”? Jesus ate that food. The Father’s work of salvation is accomplished. Now the Savior feeds you. Now the Savior gives you His victory over temptation in His body and blood. “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35). So said our crucified King. We don’t add to it. We don’t unsay what He has said. It is a joy to receive His gifts. Temptation is defeated. Christ is the Victor and we are His people.