

**St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
February 18, 2018**

Love Fights!

- 1. Love fights a personal enemy.**
- 2. Love wins a personal victory.**

Mark 1:13 and Mark 15:34

¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

³⁴ And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

Service Introduction:

Love is easy. Love is soft. Love is sentimental. Love is romance. Love is fun.

Is that the way it goes? The Apostle Paul's description in 1 Corinthians 13 is very different.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

On the Sundays of Lent, we are going to see that Love is anything but easy and soft and fun. Love is incredibly tough. Love is hard to do because Love requires you and I to fight a personal enemy.

The Message

For Jesus, the path of love meant confronting a personal enemy.

By "personal enemy" I mean that evil is not just a nameless power in the world. There is a person, a being, that will do everything that he can to keep you from showing the love that God desires.

We meet him in the temptation of Christ. Sometimes he is called "the devil" which means "deceiver." Here he is called "Satan" which means "adversary." He is your personal enemy.

The personal enemy for most of the Old Testament tried to hide in the shadows. He is there in the Garden of Eden. But he hid in a snake to tempt Eve and Adam.

We actually meet him first in the book of Job, which records events that probably occurred early in Old Testament times. There we see him, not because Job gets to confront him face to face, but because God allows us a "behind the scenes" look. At the beginning of Job, God pulls back the veil so we see Satan accusing Job of being a fair-weather believer.

Other than that account he appears only two other times in the Old Testament, both recorded very late... in Zechariah 3:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1, both written after the exile.

But now, when the Son of God steps up to begin his ministry, Satan no longer tries to hide himself. He comes out to fight. And if God's love is to triumph, love must fight!

He appeared to Jesus, but our enemy still remains hidden to us. But if we are to be faithful, love for God and love for others calls us to fight this enemy. So what do we know about him? From the rest of the Scriptures we know that angels are created beings.

⁷ In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels spirits, and his servants flames of fire" (Hebrews 1:7 quoting Psalm 104:4).

Sometime in the six days of creation, God created the angels. And sometime between God saying about all that he created, "It was very good" (Genesis 1:31), and the fall into sin in Genesis 3, some of the angels rebelled.

God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment (2 Peter 2:4).

That rebellion may be what John saw in the vision of Revelation 12:

⁷ Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. ⁸ But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. ⁹ The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Both in this chapter of Revelation 12 and in Zechariah 3, Satan is portrayed as our accuser. Zechariah sees this vision:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him.

Peter describes the devil in this way:

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

If God commands us to love... Love God above all things and love our neighbor as ourselves... then Satan's goal as our adversary is to keep us from fulfilling that commandment so that we fall under the same condemnation that awaits him.

So he is a powerful angel. He has been around since creation. He is bent on our destruction. He is our accuser. He is certainly wise.

But let's keep our enemy in perspective as well. He is more powerful than us... but he is not God. He is not all powerful. He is still subject to God. In the book of Job, God sets limits to what Satan can do to Job.

Satan is wiser than us. He has been doing this deception thing for thousands of years and can see spiritual realities that we can't. But he is not "all knowing." Otherwise he would not have masterminded Jesus' crucifixion on Passover. C. F. W. Walther in a hymn captured this so well:

The foe was triumphant when on Calvary
The Lord of creation was nailed to the tree.
In Satan's domain did the hosts shout and jeer,
For Jesus was slain, whom the evil ones fear.

But short was their triumph, the Savior arose,
And death, hell, and Satan, he vanquished his foes.
The conquering Lord lifts his banner on high;
He lives, yes, he lives, and will never more die. (*Christian Worship*, 143 vv. 2,3)

This is the enemy that came to attack Jesus in the wilderness. And his most deadly attack? To cause Jesus and us to question the truth of God's promise over and over: "I am with you."

It is amazing. Just forty days earlier Jesus had been baptized and heard the Father say, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Yet from Matthew and Luke's gospel we know that the first attack is on Jesus' identity. "If you the Son of God, make these stones become bread."

Would you be hungry like this if God were really with you?

The second two temptations raise that same question. Is God with you if you are being asked to do the "impossible" and sacrifice yourself? Take an easier way out. Just bow down to me.

If God is with you, then prove it to yourself. Throw yourself down from the top of the temple. Let all those angels come and rescue you.

And just think how these temptations must have been magnified in Jesus' mind and heart as he hung on the cross. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

God is not with me! I'm facing Satan all by myself! There is no way I can win. I might just as well give up!

So what is the target on your back? Satan doesn't know everything, but he is perceptive enough to know your weak spot and mine. What is he going to use to make you think, "God's promise to never leave me nor forsake me (Hebrews 13:5) just isn't true! I'm all alone!"

Whatever your weak spot... that is Satan's target. Love must fight this personal enemy.

But Love won a personal victory that day in the Judean wilderness.

I am amazed that the Spirit led Jesus out into the wilderness to fast. If you have ever battled an addiction, or worked with someone who has, you know that one of the first rules is don't allow yourself to get too tired. That's when Satan will attack.

Yet Jesus goes without food for 40 days. At the end he was hungry.

Why would put himself in a position of danger like that?

Could it perhaps be that Jesus was to be tempted in every way just as we are? So was this part of his humbling himself to become like us? Not only will he not use his divine power to protect himself from Satan's attacks, but he will come tired and in weakness to this temptation just as we must often face Satan's attacks when we are tired and weak.

But perhaps there is another reason. In the Old Testament, God led some of his leaders out into the wilderness to fast. Moses fasted 40 days and 40 nights on Mount Sinai. Elijah fasted 40 days and 40 nights when he too was sent by God to that same mountain.

What is the purpose of this fasting? Is it not to learn the truth by personal experience of what Jesus himself said to Satan's first temptation, "A person does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God"?

There is a passage in Colossians 2:9-10 that is the contrast to fasting. Some of you may have memorized the first part in confirmation class: "In Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form." We memorize that to emphasize that everything included in God is found in Jesus. He is fully and completely God, just like God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. But then the verse goes on, "And you have been given fullness in Christ Jesus."

God invites us to find fullness, complete satisfaction in Jesus. Think of that spiritual fullness like that feeling at the chicken dinner when there are still lots of pies and good food to eat, but you are so full, that you are content. You can't eat another bite.

In the same way, you and I can have fullness in Christ. There is nothing more that we need. Why? Because as we see Jesus' victory in this temptation, we recognize that we are victorious too.

God requires love. We fail this command. But here in Jesus' temptation we see that he didn't. And his obedience becomes our own.

This is the essential truth that I want us to walk away with today. Whenever we see Jesus victorious, that is our victory. You and I are victorious in temptation because, even though we

ourselves have failed, our Substitute obeyed perfectly in our place. “Through the obedience of the one man the many are established as righteous” (Romans 5:18-19).

But where can you find that victory?

Last week on the Mount of Transfiguration, we heard the Father say, “This is my Son. Listen to him!”

We find that victory in temptation in Jesus’ word. Listen to him.

Why do we make so much about baptisms in our congregation? Because that is where we listen to him. You and I are clothed in Christ. So that in baptism God is saying to each of us that we look just like Jesus in his eyes. Absolutely perfect. “This is my daughter/my son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased.”

Why do we make so much about the Lord’s supper in our congregation? Because that is where we listen to Jesus. He says, “This is my body given for you” personally! “This is my blood poured out for you” personally! This seals the new covenant in which God promises on oath: “I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sin no more.” Satan can’t accuse you when you can, “I remember my sin. You remember my sin, Satan. But God isn’t going to remember. He isn’t holding it against me anymore.”

Why do we make so much about daily reading of God’s Word? Because this is how the champions of the past listened to Jesus. There we see again and again our failures mirrored in the sins of God’s people in the past. There we see God’s grace in forgiving them and still claiming them as his own. There we see that Christ’s victory over Satan is our own.

So what do you do with that target on your back?

My encouragement? First acknowledge it is there. Satan knows where to attack you to make you question if God is with you or if God would ever want to be with you.

Secondly, look at the target and say, “This is why I will never take God’s grace for granted.”

Finally, take that target and rip it off as a reminder, Satan will attack, and we will fail to resist his temptations, but in Christ the victory is ours. It is a badge of honor. I am weak. But my Savior is strong! Amen.

Concluding Prayer:

It is amazing that the Son of God is served by angels. “Angels came and attended him.” In Jesus’ weakness and exhaustion after this temptation, God’s angels were there to protect him.

This is part of God pulling back to the veil. You are not alone in your temptations. Perhaps Luther recognized that more clearly than most of us. Both his Morning and Evening prayers end with the statement: Let your holy angel be with me that the wicked foe may have no power over me.”

Let’s close with Luther’s Morning/Evening Prayer.

MORNING PRAYER

In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please you. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen

EVENING PRAYER

In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have graciously kept me this day. Forgive me all my sins, and graciously keep me this night. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen

My Next Steps to Prepare for My “Love Fight”

- **Recognize your personal enemy:** The devil is like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). What is the “weak spot” in your life where the devil will attack? What can you do to prepare for that attack?
- **Remember how to defend yourself from Satan’s attacks:** Read Matthew 4:1-11 and Jesus’ use of God’s Word.
- **Claim your victory:** Read Revelation 12:10-12 to see how to silence Satan’s accusations.
- **Pray:** Martin Luther’s Morning and Evening Prayer ends with the petition: “Let your holy angel be with me that the wicked foe may have no power over me.” Pray that the Lord send an angel to protect you and others.