

SERMON THEME – “The Devil is in the Details” 2/22/26  
LENT 1, SERIES A MATTHEW 4:1-11

There is an expression that people sometimes use. I’m sure you’ve heard “the Devil is in the details.” I suppose this expression means that small things in a plan you might make, or an agreement into which you may enter, can potentially cause big problems in the future. So, look for the hidden details. Something seemingly small and innocent, insignificant and benign could prove later to be significant and harmful.

If you’ve ever purchased a big item—and you undoubtedly have, like a house or a car, even an appliance or piece of electronic equipment—then you will remember receiving a quite lengthy contract with all sorts of disclaimers, caveats, and exceptions. Then you were asked to sign that you had read and understood this statement. It would have taken an afternoon to have read the whole thing and probably a law degree to actually have understood it, so you did the best you could and dutifully signed it. Under such circumstances hearing the expression “the Devil is in the details” can be quite disconcerting and nerve racking even though you know it can be quite true.

Our Gospel Lesson for today confirms that the literal Devil can most certainly and often is in the details of life. In spite of the fact that we live in an age that has trouble believing in a literal Devil, the Scriptures consistently warn us about him. He is a reality and it is quite foolish for anyone, especially a Christian, to not be aware of his presence and influence. Now it’s also true that our own sinful nature is quite capable of all sorts of evil independently of the Devil. The Devil is completely satisfied either way, if we give him far too much credit or no credit at all.

Yes, the Devil is a reality. Don’t let the arrogance and naiveté of the culture around us persuade you otherwise. This is an important truth that we can learn from today’s Lesson. But, I pray that you will also take home something else from our reading. For Christians, our Lord is always the focal point of our lives. He is really the focal point of the reading as well, not the Devil. The reading is about our Lord overcoming the Devil. This is tremendously significant for you and me since we are no match for the Deceiver, as he is called in the book of Revelation.

The Temptation of our Lord is part of the story of the cross. It fits well on this first Sunday of Lent. It’s the first battle that our Lord fought with the Devil on our behalf after his Baptism which inaugurated His ministry. There would be other battles. It went all the way to the cross where it looked like the Devil had finally won. In actuality, the cross, where Jesus took our place and took on our sins, was our Lord’s greatest victory. This was proven in His Resurrection.

C.F.W. Walther once drew a rather interesting parallel which can help us understand the significance of Jesus’ temptation. He compared it with a familiar O.T. story, the account of David and Goliath. You’ll remember that Goliath was this giant of a man. He was a Philistine and part of the Philistine army which occupied one side of a mountain before the valley of Elah. The mountain on the other side was occupied by the Israelite army. Goliath stepped into the valley between the two armies and issued a challenge and a taunt. If any Israelite believed that they could defeat him in a one-on-one battle they should step forward. They would be a representative for the whole army. For quite a while no Israelite dared accept

the challenge and for good reason. Humanly speaking they would have no chance. Goliath was 9 feet tall and the breastplate of his armor alone weighed about 125 pounds. That's how strong Goliath was. The Israelites hated his taunts but they also trembled before his presence. For quite a while they had no choice except to listen to him rail against them. But finally, there was one who accepted the challenge—one man, rather a boy, who dared to stand against this fierce warrior. He was quite an unlikely choice to win in terms of human eyes. He was a shepherd boy who would later become king. He was David. David was victorious because the Lord was on his side. He defeated Goliath as a representative of all of Israel. The victory he won was a victory for all Israel.

In the same way you and I are really no match for the Devil. It's hardly a fair fight. He is the great Deceiver and we are sinners by nature. We can't begin to think about standing up to him in battle. Adam and Eve could not. We read about that disastrous encounter in our Old Testament Lesson this morning. The Devil can taunt us and in ourselves we can do nothing about him. But wait, there is one representative of our human race who dares to do battle with the Devil. He is the second Adam. He is also David's greater Son. The name given to him at his birth was Jesus. There's nothing special about Him in his appearance. Isaiah had prophesied many years previously. "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him." He was God's own Son as well as being our representative as a human being. He stood up to the Devil in our place. He was our representative during His temptation. We should read about his temptation with great interest. Everything is at stake for us. If he loses, we lose. If he wins, we win. Christ did defeat the Devil for us. And as we said the encounter went all the way to the cross. This is the first significance of the temptation of our Lord. We see Jesus winning our salvation for us. We are on the sidelines. We can add nothing to our own salvation. We must allow Jesus to do it in our place.

I mentioned C.F.W. Walther using the story of David and Goliath as an analogy to help us understand this. Walther also goes on to make this statement. "But this is also certain, that whoever has conquered with Christ should also fight at His side. If Satan ventured to try to tempt Christ, the Head, his members dare not remain secure. Christ is a general; therefore, all believers in Christ have been called to spiritual military service... In baptism we all vowed 'to renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways,' therefore also to fight against him. As Christ, immediately after His baptism, was led into the wilderness to be tempted, so all who have been baptized into Jesus Christ should expect nothing else."

Christ has won our salvation, he has defeated the Devil. We couldn't have done it, nor can we add anything to it. But you and I are in still in the world. Here's one of those of tensions in the Christian life between the "now" and the "not yet". I'll use Walther's words again: ""A believing Christian should follow the Captain of his salvation and also fight against Satan and overcome him through Christ's power." It's a daily struggle, isn't it?

There is so much that we can learn from our Lord. One of the things that certainly stands out in Jesus' battle with Satan is our Lord's use of the Holy Scriptures. His primary defense against the Devil's temptations was the Word of God. How instructive that is for us. Be in the Word. What a great thing to add during this Lenten Season. Add a time to read the Scriptures. Join one of our church Bible Studies. I'll say it again: Be in the word. Satan is certainly the great Deceiver. Did you notice that he even quoted

from the Scriptures in his temptation of our Lord. Jesus, of course, knew the difference between the proper use and meaning of Scripture and its misuse. That only comes for us as we abide in the Word.

We don't have time this morning to say much about our Old Testament Lesson—the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. That temptation didn't go very well. It was necessary for a Second Adam to come and this time to overcome Satan. The temptation of Adam and Eve really also boiled down to God's Word. Were they willing to take God at His Word? "Did God really say?" Sometimes I'll recommend that you take your bulletin home and look for specific things in one of the Lessons. Reread this week, this Old Testament Lesson from Genesis 3 and note how almost every verse is about taking God at His Word.

Is the Devil in the details? Yes, he is. He's often in the details of our lives. But, don't ever forget we have One who has overcome the Devil for us. This One, of course, is Jesus. He overcame the Devil at His own temptation and especially on the cross. As we are now called to battle alongside our Savior we do so only because we have first received His grace and our salvation as a free gift. Our Lord has armed us for our daily battle with the Word of God. I've quoted Walther a few times this morning. I'll end with one last quote. "Beloved hearers: Remain in the Word, and you remain with Christ; if you remain in Christ, you remain in grace; grace will lead you to eternal victory. Amen."