

“With All Boldness”

Matthew 4:1-11

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Have you ever had an interaction with someone that was just shocking and somewhat jarring? Whether someone offers an uninvited critique, assumes they are welcome at your private party, or uses you for their own gain, it's at minimum very hurtful, but also quite alarming. More often than not when we encounter those types of things, we respond with, “Well, that's bold of you!” Think about what (at least humanly speaking) Jesus must have been thinking in our Gospel lesson. Satan shows up and begins to tempt Him, knowing that He is the Son of God and has all power over him. That is certainly one of those moments where one would look at the devil and say, “Well that's bold of you!” The tempter goes before the Lord with all boldness, but his attempts fall upon deaf ears as the Word of the Lord made flesh overcomes his evil purpose.

But that's what Satan does, and he does it all too well. His temptations of God's people are seemingly endless. All you have to do is look around you in the world. Sin permeates society in so many aspects you can't even count—killing innocent babies, teaching our children to be something other than what God made them, justifying the killing of the elderly, and so much more. And you are led to believe that these things are good, just, right, and loving. Or so the devil would have you believe. Nothing would make him happier than for the people of God to abandon the Word of the Lord and assent to the evil he seeks to bring into their lives. Just as he said to Jesus, “Throw yourself down,” as he seeks the destruction of the One who has come to destroy him.

Even more distressing in our Gospel account is the way in which the tempter uses the Word of God and twists it to his own whims. As the Apostle Matthew records for us, the devil doesn't misquote anything. He takes the Word, exactly as it is written and uses it in a way that it was not intended to be used. He misappropriates it, but, as the Word Himself, Jesus is not fooled. All too often in the church today, people are fooled. So-called pastors do not abide by Paul's exhortation in 2 Timothy 2:15, to “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” Just to know the Scripture in the church is not enough. Even Satan and his demons have knowledge of the Word of truth. But they have no ability to use it rightly, nor any desire to do so. And that is the despairing aspect of what is seen throughout what we might call the “mainstream church” today.

There is not only a lack of understanding of the Word of God, but an utter lack of desire to use it properly. They would much rather do as the tempter does in our text and “with all boldness” ignore the clear admonition of Scripture, or use it improperly to their own advantage. If they can just make Scripture say whatever they want it to say, why did God even bother to write it down through His prophets, Apostles, and evangelists? That had to be what the devil was thinking as he addressed Jesus. What was written means nothing, and so I can use it to make even the One who inspired it abandon its truth. May the Lord have mercy upon His wayward people! The church is called to rightly handle the Word of the Lord, and use it in the way that Jesus does in our text—in rebuke of the sinful world and the devil, and in prayer—for the benefit of your salvation. She is not called upon to pervert it to make society and the church more compatible.

The Lord’s Church is called upon to speak the Gospel, in both the wide and narrow sense, with all boldness. You are to be enemies of the evil one who seeks to destroy the Church. Our Gospel lesson this morning is evidence of that. Jesus uses the truth and purity of the Word to refute the devil’s attacks and temptations. And that is how the Church, God’s holy people, are to react when facing the temptations the devil throws your way—through the Word, and through prayer. Luther says in his Large Catechism in the introduction to the Lord’s Prayer:

But now our enemies may confidently ridicule prayer and make a mockery of it. However, we shall still be a match both for them and the devil by prayer alone, if we only persevere diligently and do not become slack. [32] For whenever a godly Christian prays, “Dear Father, let Your will be done” [see Matthew 6:10], God speaks from on high and says, “Yes, dear child, it shall be so, in spite of the devil and all the world.”

The world and the devil will always seek your destruction and your fall from the faith. That is victory for them, but in prayer and in keeping to His revealed will, you can battle against those forces and find yourselves victorious for the sake Christ.

Jesus said to the tempter, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.’” He alone has the power, and He alone has the glory. You give Him the glory every time you gather in worship around His means of grace, where He has promised to strengthen His people through the forgiveness of sins won by Jesus upon the cross. As He faces the attacks in the wilderness, the Word of the Lord is His comfort and His shield, just as it says in Ephesians 6:16, “In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.” For those who are in the faith, the Word brings hope, comfort, and

protection. You are never alone when you have His Word, because in His Word you have Christ, the Word made flesh.

He has promised to be your shield. That is why He has gone to the cross in your place to bear your sins and be your Savior. No amount of tempting by the devil to steer Him away from that truth was successful, and as the One who has bought you back from the power of sin, and thus the power of the devil, no amount of tempting can take you away from Him. Through prayer and study of the Word, you remain strong and safe in the arms of Your loving Lord, Jesus. He has won the victory over Satan, and by His wounds you are healed. Fear need not be a factor. Temptation is empty in the shadow of the cross, because it was there that the power of the tempter was utterly destroyed. He has promised that, by faith, you have been given the benefit of His sacrifice, and you know this because God Himself has revealed it to you. It is indeed, just as the Lord says to the evil one, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

You live by every word that comes from the mouth of God. What He has revealed to you through the prophets, Apostles, and evangelists is nothing but the truth. No matter how Satan and the world he puppets try to cry that it is fallible and free to be interpreted their own way, you know what the Lord says is pure and inerrant. For the Lord says, “Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it (Lk. 11:28)!” You don’t need the world’s validation, just like your Savior didn’t need the tempter’s validation. He had the inspired, pure Word. He is the inspired, pure Word. You have the same true Word, and the Word dwells within you as one who has been baptized into His death. You now bear the name of the Lord, and so you, with all boldness, stand before the world with the Word as your weapon, as one who has been redeemed by the holy blood of Jesus.

The evil one goes before your Lord and Savior with all boldness, but he is met with rebuke and defeat. You too go before your Lord and Savior with all boldness when you pray, but you are met not with shunned defeat. You are met with the love of God for His dear child, the one whom He has adopted into sonship and given an eternal inheritance. Jesus withstood the tempter’s attacks, but He didn’t do it for Himself. He did it for you! And not to show you that its possible, but to rebuke Satan on your behalf—to show him that the one who will crush his head has come into the world and will not let him have any power over the Lord’s people. Having been baptized by John to inaugurate His earthly ministry, He goes out into the wilderness, allows Himself to be weakened and seemingly helpless, and endures the devil’s attacks so that you will have the victory.

By your baptism into the death of Christ, your sins which would give Satan any power over you have been washed away. The blood of Jesus has given you the ability to look the devil in the eye and with all boldness proclaim, “I am a baptized son of the Most High God, and you have no power here because of what Christ has done to defeat you.” The cross and His Word are your weapons against all onslaughts from the devil and this sinful world. They are your protection and your guide—the source of your salvation. At the foot of the cross is where you find the boldness to pray to your dear Father in heaven. You pray for forgiveness, and it is given to you. You pray for daily bread, and it is given to you. You pray for protection from temptation, and it is given to you. By the sacrifice of your dear Savior, you have been given all things that belong to your heavenly Father. And by His Word, He has fulfilled every one of His promises to you. So, with all boldness, you believe in the salvation He has won for you, knowing that what awaits you in the heavenly glory belongs to you for all eternity. Amen.