

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin R. Eden

The First Sunday in
Lent
Saturday, March 12, 2011 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, March 13, 2011 at 8:00 a.m. & 10:15 a.m.

“Lent is Not a Downer”

Matthew 4:1-11

In the past, I have heard a number of people say that they don't like the season of Lent, because Lent is such a “downer.” They really don't want to hear about Christ's suffering, and Christ's sacrifice. They just want to get to Easter. But Lent is not a “downer.” It's a “definer.” Christ's purpose on earth is defined through His actions leading up to, and during, the Passion week.

If Christ does not suffer, if Christ does not die on the cross, the happy, joyful season of Easter would be meaningless. If Christ did not suffer and die on the cross, we are all wasting our time here this morning/evening, because there is nothing else that can take away our accountability for our sin.

Jesus Christ is defined by the giving of His blood on the cross. He is the final sacrifice for all the sins of the world. He is the suffering servant who is totally obedient to the will of His Father in heaven. He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sake of His sheep.

Lent is not a “downer.” Lent is a wonderful time of the year, because it is in these 40 days leading up to Christ's resurrection that we see the extent of God's love for us. It is in these 40 days that we

witness Christ's example of what it means to love unconditionally: to give completely of yourself.

Christ showed His great love for us when He suppressed His Divine glory and humbled Himself by entering the world as a human child. However, Christ's humiliation was not just living as a human. His humiliation was that He was going to suffer more than any person who had walked the face of the earth.

Today's Gospel lesson tells us of His suffering at the hands of Satan, when Christ was physically weak, and Satan tempted Him. And this was a time of suffering for Jesus. The book of Hebrews tells us that: "Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

Hebrews continues and says that Christ is therefore able to sympathize with our weaknesses, because He has been tempted in every way--just as we are--yet was without sin.

In Christ's temptation in the wilderness, He defines His purpose on earth. Christ was here to suffer and be tempted in every way that we suffer and are tempted. He suffered more than any of us could imagine, not only the physical pain of being nailed to the cross, but also having the burden of carrying all the sins of the world on His shoulders.

Even before His ministry began, could you imagine the torture that Jesus went through as a child. Could you imagine what it would be like to grow up with a perfect brother who never did anything wrong

– whose parents knew He was perfect because He was from God? Could you imagine the torture that the children of Nazareth put Jesus through? There is evidence that leads us to suspect that James, the brother of Jesus, was not too fond of Him until after Christ's resurrection when James became a Christian and a leader in the church in Jerusalem.

Just as Christ suffered in every way that we suffer, Christ was also tempted in every way that we are tempted. In the wilderness, He was alone and hungry. Satan told Jesus to prove that He is the Son of God by performing a miracle and turning the stones into bread. By doing this, Jesus would accomplish two purposes. First, He would show that He has the power of God. And second, He would satisfy His hunger.

However, Christ knows that the proof that He is the true Son of God is not found in performing a miracle, but rather, the proof that He is the true Son of God is found in "every Word that comes from the mouth of God." Every word of the Old Testament pointed forward to Christ. Jesus did not need to put on a miracle show to prove that He is the Son of God.

Also, Jesus did not want to set the example of finding comfort in our time of trial in the physical things of this world. We do not live on bread alone. It is in God's Word that we find life and peace and comfort.

In response to all three of Satan's temptations, Jesus draws

strength and gives a definitive answer from God's Word alone. Being God Himself, Christ certainly had the wisdom, strength, and authority to answer Satan with His own words. However, in answering from Holy Scripture, Christ shows us that no matter how wise or strong in the faith we think we are, our best answers in times of trial and temptation are found in God's Word.

All of us face difficulty at one time or another. All of us face temptation where it would be easier to satisfy our physical desires than to stand up for what we know God's will is in our lives.

The answers for our daily lives are all found in God's Word. What our responsibility is, is to be familiar enough with the Bible that we know where to look. That will not happen if the only time you hear God's Word is here on Sunday morning. Whether it is in a Bible class, or through personal Bible reading, or through family devotions, we as a Christian community, need to expand our understanding of our relationship with God.

Unlike Christ, during our trials and temptations, we are not alone in a wilderness, unless we choose to be alone. We are only alone if we separate ourselves from Christ or from our Christian family. But our Christian family should be able to give more comfort to each other than: "Jesus loves you. Everything will be OK." Not that that is entirely bad advice. However, as God's people, we need to deepen our understanding of God and the great gifts He has given us.

When the Bible becomes an open book for you, it is amazing how

the understanding of who you are completely changes. If you feel that you are somewhat alone in a wilderness, when your relationship with God becomes the defining aspect of your life; when who you are can only be defined by describing your relationship with God, you will understand that in Christ, you are never alone.

The people who do not know Christ and are not a part of His Church will most certainly feel alone in this world. When you open God's Word and see God's patience, God's sacrifice, God's unconditional love for each one of you, only then will you understand that you are not alone. And you can say the words of Christ: "Away from me, Satan!" And with sure confidence, you can be certain that Christ is with you, and even though this wilderness of a world that we live in can be extremely difficult at times, we know that it is only a temporary place.

We know that we have our true home waiting for us in God's eternal kingdom. We know that God will never forsake His children on earth. And we have the sure promise in God's Holy Word that He will call us out of this wilderness, out of this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.

Until that day, like Christ, we continue to say, "Away from me, Satan!" And draw our strength from God's Holy Word. Amen.