

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Sinless One,  
Jesus Christ our Savior and our Lord, amen.

We don't like to talk about sin or being tempted. Even in religious circles we tend to avoid especially talking about our own specific sins or what tempts us. Oh, we Lutherans freely confess we're by nature sinful and unclean, but when it comes down to specifics we don't want to talk about what we've done or left undone. I'm not so sure confessing individual specific sins is all that important. God knows what you've done and left undone. I'm pretty sure I couldn't come up with a full and complete list of every sin I've committed anyway. Besides God knows what to do about all the junk in our lives anyway... Do you remember the story in John's Gospel about the wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee? Pretty early in the celebration the host of the party ran out of wine. Mary, the mother of Jesus said to her son, "They have run out of wine." She told Jesus the problem in only 6 words. Jesus knew what to do and the party had the best wine in so much abundance they could have partied for a month. That's not how we usually pray and not how individual confession goes either. If I'd have been the one who noticed they were out of wine, I would have given more specific instructions as to what Jesus should do. "Jesus, send Judas and James to the corner liquor store to buy that good red wine. We need about 2 or 3 more cases. You can take up a

collection after you get back, but here's my credit card to use for now... Mary simply told Jesus the problem and trusted him to make things right.

By now you're probably thinking, Pastor, what does all this have to do with the story of Jesus being tempted by Satan. If sin is the result of giving in to temptation then it's fundamental to who we are as human beings. The temptation to sin is all around us. It never takes a break nor does it take the day off on all federal holidays or even on Air Force Family days. Temptation is persistent and pervasive. The sins each temptation represents are like a huge smorgasbord. We might not take up adultery, but we sure do enjoy a good gossip or two.

We've been studying the Ten Commandments in Catechism Class. Martin Luther's explanation for the Fifth Commandment, Thou Shall not Murder is one of my favorites. Most of us would probably say, at least we haven't broken that one. Do we have any murderers here today? Before you all start patting yourselves on the back because you haven't stabbed anyone in the back, listen to what Jesus had to say about this in the Sermon on the mount from Matthew, chapter 5. <sup>21</sup> "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you

will be liable to the hell of fire.” So, anyone here never been angry with another person? Anyone ever called someone a fool or worse?

We are all sinners who fall for the devil’s temptations every day. The Bible tells us all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Scripture also tells us Jesus was human in every way, except that he was without sin. Jesus faced the same temptations we all face, but he had an answer to every temptation Satan threw his way. The three temptations in the Gospel for today are really models for all temptations. Here’s what I mean. Jesus must have been near starvation when the devil tempted him to turn the stones into bread. The Tempter comes to him and says, ”Come on Jesus, you have to eat. How can you help others if you’re too weak to help? Besides, you can make enough bread to feed not only yourself, but the entire world. Isn’t that a worthy cause? Think about it... No more starving people anywhere! Come on Jesus. Make some bread out of these stones and eat!” Jesus knew he didn’t come to earth to *make* our bread, but to *be* our bread.

The second temptation is for Jesus to throw himself off the pinnacle of the Temple. We all trust God to some extent, but how many of us would trust enough to jump from the Empire State Building and hope God would send an angel or two to catch us on the way down... Yet we put God to the test on a daily basis. In big and little ways. We pray for healing for our loved ones who are in the process of dying and expect God to perform a miracle like He’s a trained seal in a Sea World

show. God is not our cosmic slot machine that we can pull his lever or push His buttons and expect our will to be done. We fall for this temptation over and over. When I was in school, I would consistently fail to study on a daily basis and then try to cram it all in the night before the big exam. My prayer before the test was always, God, please get me through this with a passing grade and I promise to study more regularly in the future. I was putting God to the test by not being prepared and then expecting God to get me through...

Finally, the third temptation... Who doesn't want fame, or money, or power? We're talking greed here... Scripture tells us the love of money is the root of all evil. It's not the money itself, but the love of money that causes us to fall into this trap. Just like Abraham and the Chosen people of God in ancient days, we're also blessed to be a blessing to the nations of the world. You see money isn't the problem. Money is a blessing. God asks us to use it to be a blessing to our neighbors.

None of us likes to talk about the temptations that cause us to sin. I'm just happy God doesn't require us to continuously go over and over all those times when we gave in to the temptations of this world. I'm also happy that God knew all the way back at the beginning we couldn't solve our sin problem by just being a better version of ourselves. If there was going to be a solution to our sin problem, God would have to take care of it Himself. That's just what God did! Jesus said

he did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. In encountering the tempter face to face and smacking him down, Jesus did confront every temptation we face, but came out on the other side unscathed, and even more importantly, without sin.

These temptations may seem far removed from the sins we face day in and day out, but I suggest these are templates the Devil uses, adapts, and reuses over and over to catch us in his trap. Think of them as leaving God out of the picture of life and you controlling your life. Control, power, accountability, those are the sins of our lives. We like to pretend, to play games with others and with God that we're not as bad as someone else we can point a finger at. Then we sit back in the smugness of our own sin and pride. Living life my way are the call words for many people, especially Americans who love to be fiercely independent. One of the fast-food chains had a slogan a few years ago, saying, "Have it your way!" Maybe some will remember Frank Sinatra's hit song, "I did it my way!" You and I like to have things our own way. We want to take God out of the picture of our lives. We want to control and run our lives our way.

A final story... The tragedy left the man homeless, widowed and childless. Fire swept through the trailer, and all was lost. It took some time for the full weight of the loss to descend, and when it did, he was nearly crushed. Like Job he would not be comforted....When the gift of shock was lifted, anger and resentment filled every waking thought. God had not been fair to him -- God had not

protected his family. He had not come to him with a special visitation to explain the “why” or the ‘what next.’” He was in a wilderness as God forsaken as the Dead Sea... The greatest temptation was to add to his losses by giving up on his faith. He felt justified. No one would fault him. Some might even support him. He prayed angrily now, daring God to hurt him further, and challenging Him to give any reason to hold on to the thin thread of his faith that was left. He prayed angrily, but he prayed, and God could handle it... The anguish continued to mount until one afternoon he uttered a cry so forcefully, it could only be described as a scream. No word was spoken, just a loud angry scream against the forces of heaven and hell, as if to say, “I’ve hurt all I can, and I’ve paid my dues for love... Please, help me!” The silence that followed was quieter than death itself. Then a peace was evident for the first time in months. Scripture might have said, “Angels came and ministered unto him.” Satan had been overthrown, and health was coming back, for he trusted, at last, God was caring for those he lost. God was caring for him. God could handle his honest anger, and his honest emotions.

May the God of love and mercy send his angels to minister to you in your times of temptation and loss. May you find the comfort of knowing Jesus Christ has already paid the price for your sin and no temptation nor any sin is so strong that it can steal you from the hands of your savior, Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God for taking away my sin and yours. Amen.