

**+ Mark 14:32-38 + Repent: Turn to Jesus When You Face Temptation¹ +
+ Lenten Midweek #5 + Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 5 April 2017 +**

Temptation. It's been with us since an awful day in Eden when our first parents traded righteousness for a bite of forbidden fruit. It's reared its ugly head in every single life every single day since then. Perhaps comedies are on to something when they show a little demon on your shoulder whispering temptations in your ear, while a little angel tries to pull you the other way to do the right thing. It's certainly easier to laugh about temptation than resist it. We laugh, but deep down we know that temptation is no laughing matter. Temptation always leaves behind a trail of guilt and grief.

The Apostle Paul once explained it this way, ***"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man."*** (1 Corinthians 10:13) Temptation is a sad fact of life, but do you ever wonder if we might be living in an age of uncommonly bad temptation? In the Lord's Prayer, we pray, ***"Lead us not into temptation,"*** but looking at the world around you, do you ever wonder if God is still listening? Just take a quick tour through a few commandments...

We are to remember the Sabbath Day, but only 1 in 5 Americans actually attends a house of worship every weekend, and the numbers are getting worse. We are to honor our father and mother, but that can be tricky when roughly half of our nation has a father and a mother and a stepfather and stepmother and don't forget mom's new boyfriend. Honor them? Honor who? What are kids supposed to do? We are to keep ourselves from adultery, but a 12-year-old with a smartphone is just a click or two away from internet content that would make King David and Bathsheba blush.

Temptation is no laughing matter. It's a matter of life or death! As long as you live in this world, the devil has home field advantage, so temptation is all around you. As long as you have a body, your sinful nature has home field advantage, so temptation is within you. Until Christ comes again on the Last Day, Satan will never tire of tempting you. So where should you turn for help in temptation? **Turn to Jesus when you face temptation.** Why? Jesus understands temptation! The water from his baptism was barely dry when ***"the Spirit sent [Jesus] out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan."*** (Mark 1:12)

For forty days and nights, Jesus went toe-to-toe with the devil. The devil had cooked up a special batch of three temptations for Jesus—soft, subtle, and bold. He tempted Jesus' belly—make these stones into bread. He tempted Jesus to put the Father to the test by taking a flying leap off the highest point of the temple. He tempted Jesus to forsake the Father's saving plan by bowing down to the devil. What does that tell you? Satan is bold enough to tempt the very Son of God. He is brazen enough to misuse God's Word against the Word made flesh. His sole purpose was to derail God's plan of salvation before it ever left the station.

So Jesus knows all about temptation. Satan was there at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the wilderness. He was there at the end of Jesus' ministry in Gethsemane, but Satan's temptations were different this time. No longer were they soft, sweet, and subtle. No, Satan tempted Jesus with raw fear—the fear of complete rejection by his followers and his heavenly Father; terror over the next day's torture and his coming death; utter horror at the hell he was about to suffer; and gut-wrenching disgust at the thought of drinking the contents of the bitter cup before him.

Jesus prayed earnestly for the Father to take that cup from him, but what's so bad about a cup? It depends on what's in the cup! So what was in the cup that Jesus had to drink? The rebellion of Adam. The drunkenness of Noah. The lies of Abraham and the deceit of Jacob. The adultery of David. The greed of Matthew. The denial of Peter. The betrayal of Judas. The hatred of Paul.

All of it was in that cup and more! The sins of my past that I am desperate to keep secret. They're in that cup. The thoughts in my head that would make Satan blush if projected on that wall. They're in that cup. The words I've spoken to hurt others. They're in that cup. The deeds I've done to please myself and make others miserable. They're in that cup. What have you thought, said, or done just today that's in that cup? Well, the One who knew no sin drank the cup and made every one of those sins his very own.

Where you have sin, there you also have sin's wages: death, judgment, and wrath, but that's also where you find the Son of God. Jesus who is pure and holy, takes the world's sin and makes it his own. Jesus, who is life personified, faces death by crucifixion. Jesus, who loves the Father with a perfect love and is loved by the Father

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with a perfect love, now faced the Father's wrath! Jesus is truly God and truly human. The thought of what was about to happen to him terrified him as a human being and disgusted him as true God. Yet he still remained perfectly pure in tune with the Father's will. He prayed, **"Abba, Father...everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."**

Jesus turned to his Father in prayer. Temptation was trounced. The cup was drunk down to the dregs. Jesus left the garden and carried his cross to Golgotha, and there God justly condemned sin by punishing his Son. Through Christ, we receive mercy, forgiveness, and healing, because in a garden, Adam sinned and then ran, but in a garden, Christ remained holy and stood firm!

Meanwhile, a stone's throw away: **"[Jesus] returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Simon,' he said to Peter, 'are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.'"**

Peter, James, and John were part of the inner circle of Jesus' twelve disciples. They had seen amazing things like that time when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. They saw the girl start to breathe again, stand up, and get the hug of her life from her parents. Peter, James, and John were there when Jesus was transfigured before their eyes—a dazzling sight burned into their memories.

Yet in spite of what they had seen and heard, they were capable of saying some pretty head-scratching things. You might remember that time when James and John sent their mom to ask Jesus to give them seats of honor in his heavenly kingdom. They assured Jesus that they could drink the cup that Jesus would drink. Peter promised Jesus that even if everyone else fell away from him, he never would. Peter was even willing to die for Jesus!

...But not one of them could keep his eyes open to watch and pray with Jesus. Jesus had only asked them to do one thing: **"Stay here and keep watch."** Instead of comforting Jesus in his humanity, they snored away, overcome with sorrow. Their heavy hearts and eyelids were proof that the flesh is weak! They did exactly the opposite of what Jesus asked.

"Watch and pray." How many accidents have happened because someone took their eyes off the road and put them on a phone for just a few seconds? How many millions of batters have struck out because, for a split second, they took their eyes off the ball? Keeping your eyes open is important. How much more important to keep your eyes open on the lookout for Satan's tricks! Putting off your life of worship. Bored listening to the Word. Laziness with holy living. Apathy in your life of prayer. Eyelids droop. Vision blurs. Souls go to sleep, and Satan circles in for the kill! That's why the Apostle Paul warns us, **"Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.' Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity..."** (Ephesians 5:14-16)

"Watch and pray." The flesh is weak, but with the Spirit's help, our spirits are made willing. Turn to the Lord in prayer when temptation seduces! Turn to the Lord in prayer trusting two promises. With God, all things are possible. He's stronger than Satan. He's tougher than temptation. God's will is always done. So what is God's will when it comes to temptation? He reveals it and enables you to either stand firm or flee far away from it.

Without God's gift of prayer, the Judas in you would quickly betray, the Peter quickly deny, the John quickly sleep, the David quickly covet, and the Cain quickly kill. When your flesh trembles in weakness in the face of temptation, turn to Jesus—placing yourself completely in the hands of the One who triumphed over temptation. He has the strength to keep you standing firm in times of temptation! Turn to Jesus with prayers of repentance, but also find rest for your soul in Jesus who provides forgiveness and healing for the times when your flesh fails!

Temptation is no laughing matter. It rears its ugly head day in and day out. Martin Luther once quipped about temptation: **"You can't keep the birds from flying overhead, but you can keep them from building nests in your hair."** Turn to Jesus in times of temptation. Whenever you do, you are telling Satan's birds to go nest elsewhere. Yes, Satan is good at tempting, but Jesus is perfect at saving! Turn to Jesus always! Amen.