

February 21, 2010
First Sunday in Lent

“His victory, our victory”

Text: Luke 4:1-13

It’s been two weeks since the Superbowl—I know, I know. Some of you are probably thinking, “Is Pastor ever going to shut up about our football team and the Superbowl victory?” Well, that’s kind of the point though, I can’t. The day after the game I left on vacation wearing my Drew Brees jersey and my Saints cap basking in their victory and dying to chat with anybody in the airport or on the plane about the game. I washed the jersey while in Oregon and wore it again on the trip back! I’m not on the team, I can’t play professional football, at my very core I’m a bears fan, yet I seem to somehow enjoy their victory as if it were my own. Still, I will try to make this the last sermon with a New Orleans Saints reference, at least until next season.

But I bring it up again because something similar to that vicarious victory we all experienced through the Saints two weeks ago plays out in a much more connected way in our Gospel lesson from nearly 2000 years ago. It’s something we may miss or treat lightly because we’ve probably all heard this story many times before.

It’s early in Luke’s Gospel. Jesus has been baptized by John the Baptist and immediately He, *“full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil.”* And a lot of us might just want to skip over this story quickly saying, “Yeah, Jesus gets tempted but doesn’t give into sin. Of course He doesn’t. He’s God.” But that’s kind of missing the point here. The point isn’t that Jesus is God although that is truth. The point is that Jesus is human, Jesus is one of us. In a way, that makes Jesus our home team in this battle between good and evil.

As we read this story of Jesus’ early ministry, it is a lot like watching a competition in which we’ve seen other teams fail many times before. It’s like watching a contest similar to that in which we ourselves have taken part, yet so often suffered defeat after defeat. But this time we have a true champion competing for us, and we look on as He succeeds where we fail.

The first temptation is so very common. It is as a matter of fact the very first temptation. It is a temptation to eat. *“The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’”* This is the temptation that God’s first child, Adam, failed in Eden, and he wasn’t even really hungry. Adam failed to trust in God, to let God be the one in charge and instead ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in an attempt to be like God.

And I used to wonder, “Why shouldn’t Jesus eat? He’s hungry and He’s Jesus. Go ahead!” But the passage in Deuteronomy that Jesus cites to shoot down this temptation refers to how God tested the nation of Israel in the wilderness by letting them hunger. They failed that test. They complained and bickered against Yahweh and sinned until God miraculously fed them with manna from heaven. Jesus doesn’t fall into that trap and repeat that sin. He doesn’t eat, but trusts in the will of God and passes the test, wins the victory over the Devil’s trap.

The second round of temptation is on another level, and is frankly a bit scary for us. *“And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, ‘To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’”*

It's scary to think the devil has this kind of authority, but you look around are world today and you have to wonder. But any authority the devil has here is over a world that is decaying and dying. Any glory he can give is flawed and short lived. This is the kind of authority Adam chased after. This was the glory the people of Israel sought when they chased after sinful pleasures and other gods.

Jesus knows where true power and glory lie, with the Lord your God. Jesus is the child of God, and He is not interested in losing that glory that goes with that for some flawed and cursed imitation. He keeps all worship and homage where it should be, and thus wins against the Devil again.

In the last temptation the Devil tries to twist the Holy Scriptures to His advantage. *“And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” And Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.””*

Jesus has perfect faith and has no need to question if God is with Him. Moreover, Jesus did not come into humanity in order to be saved and exalted by God on the earth. Jesus' mission is just the opposite and He is not falling into the Devil's trap of abandoning it. Jesus has come specifically to fall under the Father's wrath for our sin. Jesus has come to suffer rejection, abuse and death and He sticks to that mission. Point, set and match go to Jesus. The victory is His. Who Dat!

And this is not just some story about Jesus. This is critical for you and for me. On one hand, Jesus is a great example for what we strive to do in the face of temptation. We are not to grumble against God under adversity, but turn to Him with confidence He will carry us through. We are not to usurp God's glory and authority in our lives to try and grab some fleeting power and prestige of this dying world. We are to instead remember that glory and honor belong to the Lord our God, and that as we remain His children His glory becomes ours also into eternity. And we are to remember that suffering for God and serving God and neighbor in love is our true calling as God's children. We do not test God and lose faith in Him if our lives aren't the bed of roses we want them to be. We love and serve and serve and love as Jesus did.

And on the other hand, and maybe even more importantly, we remember that these are victories for Jesus as a man. He is perfect. He does not fail. The victory of living a sinless life is His! He is a perfect one of us!

You and I don't do this in and of ourselves. In some way, shape or form we manage to fail these tests and others on a daily basis. Remember those bags over the heads of Saints fans? We should feel that way about ourselves. If it was up to us, the victory would never be ours.

But in our baptism, the perfect performance of Christ as a human being is made to be ours. The same feeling we got about the Saints victory somehow being our victory? How much more joyful should we be knowing that Christ's victory over sin is completely and totally our victory over sin? How joyful should we be knowing that we may kneel at this rail with that shameful bag over our head because of our sins, but we walk away having received in the body and blood of Christ that perfect walk of faithfulness and righteousness that He walked? That's exactly what happens. When we repent as a group and I say your sins are forgiven, or when you just say you're sorry as you pray silently at night and know in your heart God hears and answers that prayer, you have been given that victory that the human being Jesus Christ won with His perfect life. He guaranteed it with death and resurrection.

A lot of the Saints players talked about how they were glad to win the Superbowl for the sake of the city and for the sake of their fans and we gloried in that victory with them. When you think on this story of Jesus life, remember it is not just about Jesus. It is about Jesus for you. It is about Jesus coming for a purpose and doing human life perfectly so that His reward can be yours also.

His victory is yours. Live that victory as best you can in this life to the glory of the Lord your God who sent Him, for this victory is surely yours into life eternal.