

March 17, 2019

Luke 13:31-35

“Lord, I’m Tempted” Series

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“Tempted Just Like Jesus”

Celebrities often seem to live in a different world than we do, don’t they? Even when it comes to our sermon topic, temptation, celebrities seem to face different temptations than we do.

For instance, we learned this week that certain celebrities have to wrestle with the temptation to pay massive illegal bribes – tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of dollars even -- to get their kids get into college. Have you ever even been tempted to do that? Me neither.

The reality is, whether you’re a celebrity or not, we all face plenty of temptations. Daily. Constantly. Temptations to sin. Temptations to break the law of the land. Temptations to break the law of God. Temptations stemming from greed, self-centeredness, arrogance, lust, pride, vengeance, stinginess, anger, covetousness. Have you been tempted to sin yet today? You will. Every one of us will.

Even Jesus was tempted, the Bible says. We heard last week about our Lord triumphing over temptation in the wilderness. Forty long days. Dealing with the devil’s nonsense nonstop, *mano a mano*. Most of us can’t quite relate to temptation on that level, can we?

But today we read about another temptation that Jesus faced. And this one I think we can really connect to. Today’s temptation story teaches us that we are tempted just like Jesus.

Luke tells us that, one day, Jesus is warned of danger ahead. Interestingly, it’s some Pharisees who caution him. Apparently, not all of the Pharisees were his enemies. Jesus is warned that another enemy, the murderous King Herod, is

out to get him. Herod has already beheaded Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist. Now he's eager to get rid of Jesus, too.

So what is the temptation here, exactly? Avoiding danger? Escaping an enemy's trap? Those aren't sins, are they? But Jesus is being tempted in a deeper way. The real temptation for him is try to save his own skin, instead of doing what he knows God wants him to do.

See, Jesus knows that his task is to sacrifice his life to save sinners like us. He's heading toward Jerusalem, toward the cross. And the Lord is fully aware that suffering, torture, rejection, crucifixion, and death are all on the path ahead for him.

So when he is directly warned, "Hey, Herod's going to kill you," it must be tempting for Jesus to want to get off that path. To hide. To run. To save himself.

And, yes, Jesus could have done that. He had free will. He could have chosen to follow the friendly Pharisees' advice. Jesus could have given in to the temptation to self-preserve, to take the detour around suffering. But he didn't.

"Go and tell that fox (Herod)," Jesus says, "that I'm on my way. I'm doing my work. I'm accomplishing my mission. I'm finishing my course."

Jesus knows that if he takes the detour he won't reach the destination. He has to suffer and die on the cross to pay for our sins, to save our souls. And he does.

We're forgiven today, because Jesus didn't give in here. We're rejoicing in the presence and the love of God today in our church, because Jesus faced that temptation right here without sinning. We have the sure promise of life after death, eternal salvation, because Jesus didn't choose to save himself.

And all of that is brilliant! But what else do we get from this story? Is there help for our temptations here? Is there really

any similarity between the temptation Jesus faced here, and the temptations we're going to face today?

Absolutely! Sometimes we're tempted to do this or that, to trespass here or there. But sometimes our temptations are exactly like this one that Jesus faced. Aren't you tempted once in a while to avoid doing what you know God wants you to do? Aren't we all tempted regularly to not bother following God's directives, to ignore God's call? Tempted to care more about our personal agendas than about God's mission? Sometimes the path God wants us to walk is uncomfortable, unpopular, inconvenient, dangerous. Isn't it tempting for us, just like Jesus, to take the detour?

And don't we all have free will, just like Jesus? Don't we all get to choose every day? Good or evil? Right or wrong? God's path or the personal preference path?

The thing is, we have a hard time choosing, don't we? We give in so easily! We fail in our choices over and over. The awful truth is that we have free will, but – sinners that we are -- we cannot choose good over evil on our own. Because we are sinful to the core, sinful in our very human nature. We're damaged, with a terrible predisposition to give in to those daily, constant temptations we face.

But Jesus didn't give in. And because he didn't give in to this temptation – because he finished his course, and died to forgive our sins – he is able to help us in our times of temptation. No, we can't choose good over evil on our own. But Jesus Christ promises to never leave us or forsake us. And in those moments of decision, when we're tempted to sin, Jesus offers you and me real help, actual help, powerful help, to keep you on the right path.

Christ's help is, first, forgiveness, pardon for our sin. But with it comes renewal, restoration, re-birth on the inside. Jesus didn't forgive us so that we can keep on sinning in the same old ways forever. Jesus didn't pour out his grace on you in your Baptism so you can keep wallowing in your sin. He wants to help you today with your temptations.

Christ's help comes by Word, by Sacrament. These are powerful means of grace. Here is God's grace for you to receive and to employ in today's battle against temptations.

Christ's help comes by the work of his Holy Spirit in your heart every day, every moment, even and especially when you're tempted. Don't ever be fooled into thinking you're alone, or abandoned, when you're facing a temptation. God's all-powerful Spirit is living in you! Maybe that little prayer, "Lord, I'm tempted," is a good cry for help, acknowledging his presence in your moments of temptation.

And Christ's help comes through the Christian community. We're here for each other, here in this place; and when we let our Christian friends in, when we confide in our Christian brothers and sisters, when we're accountable to each other in our small groups, our Lord has a way of working through those relationships.

Jesus never promises to remove all temptation from our lives. But he will always help us when we're tempted

Temptation is a big topic, isn't it? We have a lot more to talk about in the weeks ahead. So keep coming to church, Wednesdays and weekends. We all need Christ's help for our temptations, don't we? Even the celebrities among us! And our Savior is always ready, willing, and able to give it. Amen.