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Christ the Rock Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

1 Corinthians 10:12-13

WHEN RESISTING TEMPTATION, CHRIST IS OUR STRENGTH

In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, dear friends ...

“To be tempted is to be human,” someone has said. That temptations will come along in life is a “given,” a certainty, St. Paul tells the Corinthians in our text.

Temptation is much like a river I knew as a youth growing up in Wisconsin. To the tourist it seems peaceful enough as it cuts its way between grassy banks and rolling hills, but those who live near the Wisconsin River respect it, for it has claimed many lives. Its sandy bottom is filled with sudden drop-offs. Undercurrents capable of overpowering the strongest of swimmers hide beneath its peaceful flow. In places there are floating islands that have the appearance of solid ground, but those who step on to them from a boat fall through into deep water below.

So also the river of temptation flows through our lives, seemingly peaceful, harmless, inviting us to wade into its shallows. But beneath its quiet surface lies great danger. To avoid the harm temptation poses to us, we need to have an understanding of the nature of temptation: what it is, how it works, what its aim and intent is. Then, and only then, can we appreciate the solid ground the Lord would have us stand upon — that ground which is Christ Jesus Himself.

I. Temptations course through our lives

Every Sunday and often in-between we pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” But what is temptation? Here Webster's Dictionary does a good job with its definition: *Temptation: the act of enticement to do wrong by promise of pleasure or gain.* Isn't that exactly what Satan did with Adam and Eve, promising them that they would be like God? He used the same tactic with Jesus, dangling in front of Jesus the thought of relief for His hungry body, the opportunity to rule the kingdoms of the world, or to make a name for Himself with a leap from the roof of the temple.

If the question was asked, “What first comes to mind when you hear of temptation?” the common response is, “that which has to do with lust, with sexual desire, something that is immoral.” That certainly is temptation common to us all in our Sodom and Gomorrah age. And the currents of this temptation are some of the strongest we face in life. But while temptations of the flesh get the headlines, the list is much longer. We are tempted to gossip, to lie, to steal, to deceive; we are tempted to pride, and to hold a grudge. There is the strong temptation of appetite

and over-indulgence, and of ambition. Let's also not forget the temptation of riches which drowned Achan in its current during the fall of Jericho, and nearly destroyed Abraham's nephew, Lot, as well as King Solomon and so many others. As different as a river is just around the bend, so varied are the temptations that flow through our lives. At one stage of life we find that certain temptations pull more strongly than others. Then, about the time we think we have a degree of resistance, along comes a whole new set of temptations to challenge our footing.

Whatever the temptation we face at any given time, there are four steps in temptation's process of sweeping us away in its current. Recognizing these steps is essential to dealing with all temptations.

And old proverb says, "The thought is mother to the deed." That's absolutely the case with temptation. Temptation begins with a thought, often no more than a random thought or that of your subconscious mind. These thoughts pop into the mind seemingly from nowhere and can be as easily dismissed. People have asked me, "When I was in the store recently, I had the strongest impulse to just put an item I wanted in my pocket rather than pay for it. Was that a sin?" No. It was a temptation, but not a sin. Dr. Martin Luther explained this so well. He said, "*I can no more keep myself from being tempted than I can prevent the birds from flying over my head.*" Yet he pointed out the danger of underestimating temptation when he went on to say of those birds, "*but I can keep them from building their nests in my hair.*"

Stage two is reached when temptation begins that nest building process. If you recall those temptations that sucked you in, you will appreciate St. Paul's directive in 2 Corinthians 10:5: "***take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.***" It is during this second stage that we feel the pull of the river's current much stronger now. Listen to how that pull is described so accurately in the first temptation: "***When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye...*** (Gen.3:6). Did you catch it? She "***saw***" that fruit in a different way, in a way that appealed to her. The thought wasn't quickly dismissed; instead, Eve began mulling it over in her mind. This second step is quickly followed by the next: "***...and also desirable for gaining wisdom***" (Gen.3:6). "***also***" - What a big little word! "***also***" - there's something to be gained here, wisdom, to be like God! That's step 3.

When that wrongful desire, that angry feeling, that thought, "What would it be like to have sex with him, or her" — has rooted in my mind, I have stepped into the drop-off. I have become a sinner. Jesus made this clear when He said, "***Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart***" (Mt.5:28). And the Apostle John wrote, "***Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer***" (1 Jn.3:15). Who read that heart? Who saw that lust, that hatred, that covetousness? God did. And that's what makes even those thoughts "sin", because sin is the violation of God's will and of His Word, even if only you and God know about it.

The fourth and final stage of temptation is to act upon the temptation. Here the will consents to the deed, as in Eve's reaching out to take of the forbidden fruit. Now the river of temptation has one in its grasp, the end result of which, without repentance, is eternal death and hell.

II. Temptations come under control through Jesus

Temptation is **“common to man,”** (vs.13) the Apostle has told us. We can expect that dangerous river to flow through our lives. But that is no excuse to let it just carry us along, as some excuse their fall into temptation with the word, “Well, that’s just part of being human.” So is taking a bath, but we don’t choose to bathe where we might drown. So Paul would not only warn us of the danger of temptation, but teach us how to swim when caught in its current.

“God is faithful, He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear”(vs.13). Is that a true statement? Is it true even when the temptation we face is oh, so strong? Yes! It is true because our heavenly Father allowed Jesus to be tempted to the absolute limit for us.

The gospels tell us, **“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil”** (Mt.4:1). This follows immediately after Jesus’ baptism, immediately after that Voice from heaven identified Jesus as God’s Son. Jesus has come to do battle with Satan in order to reverse the results of our first parents’ succumbing to temptation. So, the Holy Spirit led Jesus to where Satan could put Him to the test, a test with eternal consequences for all of us hanging on the outcome.

Don’t think either that wilderness encounter wasn’t a real test, that Jesus wasn’t really tempted as we are. He faced Satan with the same equipment as Adam and Eve, with a human nature in its sinless state. Those temptations carried the same deadly possibility of defeat for Jesus as did the temptation in the Garden of Eden. But this Man, this “second Adam,” Jesus was victorious. He defeated Satan using God’s most powerful weapon, His Word.

When Paul writes in our text, **“God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear,”** he is calling on us to remember those promises God has made to us in Jesus Christ, for example, the promise to forgive everyone who calls on Him for mercy in the name of Jesus. Romans 10:13, **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”**

God is faithful in His promise to credit to every believer in Jesus the righteousness His Son earned for us, though as sinners we deserve nothing of the sort. I John 1:9 says, **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”**

God is faithful in His promise to provide us with His own divine strength to resist temptation’s strong pull. In the wilderness, Satan said to Jesus, **“If you are the Son of God... (Mt.4:3).** And Jesus sure showed Satan He was that, didn’t He? If we are the children of God through faith by our baptism “into Christ,” - and that is what God has made us to be through that washing — then we are not helpless victims in our temptations any more than Jesus was in His. If Jesus is with us always, as He promised (Mt.28:20) - and He is! - then we can rely on God’s Word to protect us against the devil’s lies, just as Jesus did. That is God’s promise to us. **“Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world”** (1 Jn.4:4). As a Christian you have in you a greater power to resist temptation than the devil has to make that temptation seem irresistible. That power is Christ in us, Christ our Victor for us, who defeated Satan in the wilderness, in the Garden of Gethsemane, in those dark hours on the cross and in His glorious resurrection from the dead. Call on Him in when you are being tempted. Call to mind God’s Word and the Holy Spirit will put in your hand the sword to beat back the attack of the tempter.

Lastly, Paul says the Lord ***“will also provide a way out”*** from temptation (*vs.13*). That ***“way out”*** may be early resistance with the Word of God. It may be the path of repentance when we are overcome. It may be taking immediate action: looking away from the temptation, physically removing ourselves, avoiding places and people who might draw us in. Whatever the ***“way out,”*** God will make it clear to us if we stay open to His Spirit.

Jesus is our strength, Jesus is our Victor when it comes to resisting temptation. May we remember this that it might be written of us, ***“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial, because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him”*** (*James 1:12*).

Amen.