



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

# Minnesota South District

*...developing leaders intentionally engaged in the mission of God*

March 5, 2019

<sup>1</sup>Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness <sup>2</sup>for forty days, being tempted by the devil...<sup>5</sup>The devil took Jesus up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” <sup>8</sup>And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’”

(Luke 4:1-2, 5-8)

Dear Brothers in Christ,

During the season of Lent, we’re reminded all the more intently about the temptations that we face because we remember the temptations that Jesus faced. The audacity of Satan should tell us something about his tenacity and determination. He attacks anything and everything allied with God and His Kingdom. Even though Jesus was the very Son of God, that did not stop Satan from tempting Him. This should serve as a stark warning to the likes of us who serve as under-shepherds in Christ’s flock. Because we are baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit, called and ordained into His ministry, we’re targeted for attack. We should expect to be afflicted with the constant temptations of Satan. We dare never forget how sinister he is and how deadly his lies are.

Satan desired that Jesus worship him and so tempted him with power and prestige. But Jesus thwarted his attack with the Word of God (from Deuteronomy 6:13): **“It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’”**

In my first letter, I wrote to you about being mindful of the distinction between power and authority. Namely, how pastors are called to serve from the authority of Christ (right hand kingdom) and not from human power (left hand kingdom). Yet, as this account reminds, we do well to note exactly what Satan targets and what he attacks. The devil loves to attack the worship of God. If he is bold enough to tempt Jesus in his worship, he sure won’t hesitate to assault you spiritually in an effort to distract, disorder, or even destroy your worship life.

The fact is we—the very ones who lead God’s people in worship—often battle spiritual apathy and fatigue in our own worship lives. The ancients called this spiritual malaise *acedia* (ah-ka-dia). Often translated “sloth,” it is a kind of spiritual boredom resulting from the oppression of Satan. Acedia often presents as despondence or even depression, but the malady is more spiritual than clinical or psychological, though the two sometimes overlap.

As the church enters the Lenten season, be assured, dear pastor, that the devil will ramp up his assaults on you all the more as the under-shepherd of Christ’s church. Think of how cunning and effective Satan can be as he launches an attack on your worship life. If he can disorder your spiritual and worship life, (i.e. tempt you to put out of proper order your love and trust in God), he can likewise disorder the purpose for which you serve as pastor (i.e. tempting you to use human power rather than Christ’s authority). As a result, he will then also tempt you to ignore the God created order of your other vocations as husband, father, grandfather, or friend. Even more cunningly, if he can disorder your worship life, he can thwart the spreading of the Gospel and undermine the church (1 Cor. 14:33).

Think about it. Our worship life is the focus of our Christian life. As Lutherans, we confess that worship is not just what we do, but it is what God does for us, to us, and in us, and wherein we then

respond. Consider the order of the Divine Service. Whether our sung prayer and praise is accompanied by contemporary versions of the Old Testament stringed instruments or the later invention of the pipe organ, the liturgical structure that shapes Lutheran worship distinctly emphasizes God serving us through His word and sacraments and our response to that service. This, of course, is why we Lutherans call our manner of worship the *Divine Service*. This is our public recognition that the word “liturgy” means God serving us.

Regardless of how the liturgy is framed musically in your congregation, our Lutheran understanding of worship is not merely some theological or dogmatic category to acknowledge intellectually. The liturgy is something we pastors participate in, lead, and most importantly, receive! For before we can feed the souls of our congregations, we must be sure that our souls are being fed the means of grace. It is far too easy for us to just go through the motions of worship, putting on a good game face as we bear up under the affliction of acedia and all the other pressures and burdens of pastoral and family life without actually engaging in worship.

The devil desires to sift your soul, dear brother; he plays for keeps. Take care then to guard your soul. Be sure to fortify yourself against his sinister ways by regularly confessing your sins and receiving the healing balm of the Gospel—even as you tend the souls in your congregation and spread that Gospel in your community.

To be sure, Satan will do all he can to lead us into temptation. But make no mistake: God tempts no one. Jesus leads us not into temptation but through temptation. Rather, He guards and keeps us in every temptation that comes our way. He leads us through our sin—through lost tempers, cold shoulders, and grandiose gossip. Jesus leads us through broken hearts and hardened hearts. He even leads us through death itself. Thus, our prayer is the prayer of Jesus: “**Lead us not into temptation.**” His lips spoke it. His heart prayed it. His life leads us through it. Jesus leads us to the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

So we know we will be tempted by the devil. But we rejoice that we have a Savior who has defeated the devil and gives us the victory. As you proclaim this to your people, please hear me now: Jesus willingly went to the cross to be crucified, to bleed, to suffer, and to die in payment for every temptation that you give into, every sin that you commit, and every sin committed against you. He came to take them all away and bury them in His own tomb to free you for a life of love and service to others.

When our Lord Christ rose from the dead, He proved once and for all that He is the almighty, unstoppable, and all-powerful Son of God! He literally went through Hell to save you and me—He isn’t about to ever let go.

Yes, the truth is the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh will tempt us throughout our lives. But you and I have a Savior who overcame every temptation on behalf of us, defeated the devil for us, and by the water and baptismal Word of God, has given His victory to us.

There’s a ton of misery in this world, and I have no doubt you run into a lot of it each and every day in your life and work. But in this world of so much bad news, you are a good news man. Be assured that you and your families, your coworkers and your congregations are regularly in my prayers—that you would not lose hope in the face of what so often seems almost overwhelming. Rather, know that the devil has no claim on you, for you dear brother, are Christ’s man.

Your brother in Christ,



Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Woodford