

Sermon for March 10, 2019
“Where Humanity Fails, Jesus Prevails!”

Luke 4:1-13

The story is as old as time and as current as the most recent half hour news cycle. A rising young corporate star takes over the finance department of a major corporation. Everyone knows that she is the go-to person in that department. Everyone looks to her and trusts her. Then irregularities come to light. Investigations ensue, offshore bank accounts are uncovered and indictments are issued. The truth comes out: large sums of money were embezzled. This trusted corporate star had been using the company's assets as her own personal slush fund.

A third world country is in turmoil. A repressive regime is being overturned by the masses. A charismatic community leader garners support from disparate factions of the rebellion to put together a working government. A constitution is drafted and approved and the leader indicates that he will step down when the time comes. But as elections near potential opposition candidates begin dropping out or disappearing. The president is reelected for one, two, three terms and more. 20 years later there is another uprising.

An athlete who is at the top of his game. Against the odds this athlete wins contest after contest. He is truly a superstar in his field. Then allegations of banned substances come to light. Denials are made and after investigations the truth comes out. All those victories, all that stamina and strength were gained not by hard work, but by hormones and chemicals.

But then there is the story of Jesus. Jesus the Son of God, the descendant of Adam and Eve was led by the Spirit into the desert. At his baptism the voice of his Father spoke from heaven. And in that moment Jesus was called into the ministry that he came into this world to fulfill. He would begin healing and teaching and raising the dead and casting out demons.

But the Spirit did not drive him at first to the cities where the people were, but away from the cities. The Spirit drove Jesus to the emptiness of the wilderness. It led him there and for 40 days and nights Jesus ate nothing. After forty days Jesus was famished.

Now I have fasted for 1 meal or for a day. Usually I start the fast after an early supper one day and then 24 hours later I eat a late supper. That way I only really skip two meals. And frankly that by itself is difficult. But Jesus had fasted for 40 days. That is 40 breakfasts, lunches, dinners, mid-morning snacks, etc.

It was in the midst of this weakened state that the Devil came to Jesus. He was seeking to take advantage of Jesus' weakened state. His first temptation to Jesus was to turn stones into bread. Well, here was the Son of God and he was there at creation. He had created stone and all the ingredients of bread. Just a word or a wish and all the stones of the desert would become fresh baked loafs of homemade rye and wheat and pumpernickel, maybe even some of those cheese biscuits they have at Red Lobster.

But Jesus replied, “Humans do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Now this is significant. Most people think that Jesus, being the Son of God, wasn't really tempted by this obvious ploy to use his physical appetites. But don't forget that Jesus was also a son of Adam and Eve and the children of Adam and Eve have a bad record with appetites of the flesh.

Just consider the parents of our race. Adam and Eve were hardly hungry in the Garden of Eden. They had all that they could want to eat. Every kind of plant and fruit fresh from the vine. But there was that one forbidden fruit. And what did they do? Did they say “we have all that we can eat?” or “God has given us all we need.” No! They gave into the temptation because the forbidden fruit looked good.

This is what is so significant. The parents of the human race could not withstand even a small temptation. And you know how it is. You can't stop at just one. The end result is this world of hatred, violence, prejudice and evil that we live in. But Jesus, also a child of Adam and Eve, could resist the temptation, and he fulfilled the righteousness that we could not.

But the Devil didn't stop? He then showed Jesus all the Kingdoms of this world and said, "I have control of all the kingdoms of this world and I will give them to you if you will just bow down and worship me." But Jesus responded, "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him." This may have seemed a rather transparent ploy on the part of the Devil. After all he was dealing with the Son of God. Certainly, Jesus would see right through this and he did.

But you can't blame the Devil for trying what had worked in the past. The temptation to seize power and wealth has led many to a fall. Many have been willing to bow down to the gods or devils of greed and wealth and prejudice and so on to have power over the kingdoms of this world. When we are tempted to worship the dollar or our things how often do we say, "It is written worship only the Lord your God." Most children of Adam and Eve say, "Okay Devil, looks good. Where do I sign?"

But not one child of Adam and Eve. Jesus saw right through this ruse. He saw that, as golden as the kingdoms of this world are, they are fleeting. And while the Devil has power and authority over them it is only temporary and limited. So, Jesus the Son of God the Son of humanity prevailed where all of us fail.

But the Devil went on. He took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple, and said, "Throw yourself down for the Bible says that God's angels will catch you." This was a little more sophisticated. What would happen if Jesus did jump and all the religious leaders and the people saw angels come down from heaven to catch him? They would recognize him as the Messiah and declare that fact.

This "temptation" seemed to end with the result that God wanted. The Father wanted people to acknowledge the Son and worship him, but Jesus knew that it was not the way the Father had planned for it to happen. That was the easy way out. God wanted people to respond in faith, but the Father had planned for the Son to suffer and die and rise again.

In contrast how many of us are willing to suffer for the kingdom. We see a need and know that God wants us to do something about it. Often times we know what we need to do to address it, but we are unwilling to sacrifice. We look for the easy way to put a band aid on the problems of the world instead of sacrificing the time and money and personal effort that it takes to do it God's way.

If there is one thing that the temptations teach us it is that Jesus prevails where humanity fails. Each of the temptations represents an area where we fail regularly, but Jesus didn't. From the beginning we have been constantly giving in to worldly appetites. Throughout history we have succumb to the call to power and wealth. We are constantly looking for the easy way out instead of following the way of sacrifice that God calls for.

So, what are we to do? We seem genetically predetermined to give in to temptation. It is as if it is in our blood to fail. And in a sense, it is! To err is truly human.

But Jesus didn't fail. He was a descendant of the same sinful race as we are. The difference is that he was full of the Spirit of God. Triumph over temptation was in his veins just as much as failure is in ours.

What we need to do is trust in him. Let that same Holy Spirit that lived in him live in us. We will fail if we trust in our own abilities. So, we need to trust in his strength in times of trial and temptation. For where humanity fails, Jesus prevails. Give yourself to Jesus and let him prevail in you!