**1st Sunday in Lent – Year C – February 17, 2013 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Luke 4:1-13 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**“A Tailor-made Temptation, Designed Just for You”**

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.*

*3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” 4 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone.’” 5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. 7 So if you worship me, it will all be yours.”*

*8 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’” 9 The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. 10 For it is written: “‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; 11 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” 12 Jesus answered, “It says: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” 13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.*

About 2,500 years ago, a fellow by the name of Aesop told a tale. This fable of Aesop begins with a sad, sorrowful female eagle sitting on the branch of a tree. Next to her sat a kite, a carrion-eating raptor. Noting the eagle's dejection, the kite asked, "Why does the most majestic of birds wear such a mournful look?" The eagle sadly replied, "I seek a mate and I have been unable to find one." After a moment, the kite sympathetically suggested, "Why not marry me?" The eagle turned and asked, "And could you take care of me?" Wounded by the question, the kite boasted: "Why, I have often carried away ostriches in these talons."   
  
With no other offers forthcoming, the eagle agreed to be married to the kite. Soon after the ceremony, she said to her husband, "I wonder if you would bring back an ostrich for supper. I've never eaten an ostrich and I think one would be wonderfully delicious for our evening meal." In a second the kite was gone. In two seconds he was back and placed before her not an ostrich, but a mouse. A pitiful, pathetic -- and, from the smell of things -- long dead mouse. Insulted, the eagle cried: "And is this how you fulfill your promise?" To which the kite confessed: "I said what was necessary to get you to do as I wished."   
  
This story accurately describes the all-too-successful temptation technique used by Satan since the beginning of time. Our old evil foe has shown his willingness, his readiness, his eagerness to say anything and everything necessary to get us to do what he wants. He knows exactly what to say to each and every one of us. He is like a tailor in a suit and dress shop, who measures, takes notes, and then finds the perfect suit or dress for you try on – a tailor-made temptation designed just for you. This morning we will further examine the devil’s techniques but focus on Jesus and how he too, was tempted just like we are today, but was victorious over the devil.

In our confession of faith this morning we used Martin Luther’s explanation to the sixth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Lead us not into temptation.” The Bible tells us that God does not tempt anyone to sin. Only the devil uses temptation to lead people to sin in their thoughts, their words or their actions. A temptation is any situation that might lead a human being into false belief, despair or great and shameful sins.

The Bible is full of examples of the devil using temptation to lead believers to sin against God’s commandments. Many of the examples involve the great heroes of faith – men and women who we regard to be people who have a strong faith. Noah, for example, in great faith believed God’s promise to flood the earth and built an ark. After the flood, he fell for Satan’s trap of excessive drinking of alcohol, became drunk, which led to some immodest behavior. David, a shepherd boy, in great faith boldly trusted the LORD to give him the strength to fight a 9-foot giant on the battlefield. Yet, he tried on the clothes the devil offered him, clothes labeled “lust, sexual impropriety, murder and lies.”

A sermon on temptation wouldn’t be complete without the story of the Garden of Eden. Again, like the kite in Aesop’s fable, Satan knew exactly what to say to Eve and Adam. He offered a dress labeled “doubt.” Try this on… “Did God really say this? And if he did, then he really isn’t a good God, is he?” Then he offered a dress labeled “pride” and another labeled “lust” and “greed.” “God is lying to you. You won’t die. He just doesn’t want you to be like him, knowing good and evil.” The devil knows just what to offer.

I’m sure that most of you have these in your closet or dresser: comfort clothes. You know which ones I’m talking about… the lounge pants and baggy sweatshirt you wouldn’t be caught dead in outside the house. Most of us have temptations that are just like that. We know which temptations they are. We are comfortable with them. Take a minute to think about those temptations to which you are most susceptible.…

That’s uncomfortable, isn’t it? But there are other clothes that Satan will offer you to try on, clothes you don’t always recognize at first because Satan knows your weaknesses better than you do and he knows best how to exploit them. But the tactic is usually the same. First, he offers you to try on the suit called “doubt.” “Did God really say you can’t do this or that you have to do that?” And it gets you thinking, “Do I really have to be honest with my tax deductions and claiming all of my income? Do I really have to forgive and forget? I really can’t go to those websites? I know he/she isn’t my spouse but can’t I flirt with them a little bit?” And we rationalize the test drive, “But… it wouldn’t hurt to try, would it? Besides, what harm could it do? Most other people do this anyway. And they don’t seem to have any problems. Besides… I have faith. I can always ask for forgiveness later.” And so you try the temptation on, because it looks good, and it usually feels good… at first.

But what happened to the people in the Bible? King David ruined what could have been a strong family dynamic. Some of his sons were rebellious and others died, because of his selfishness and lust. What happened to Achan in the First Lesson this morning? (Joshua 7:16-26) He was stoned to death, all because he coveted something he couldn’t have, and he took it anyway.

That’s what happens when we try on Satan’s temptations. They ruin lives… our own and the lives of others. They lead us into false belief. We begin to doubt everything God says. They lead us into great and shameful sins, sins we wish we could cover up. But these clothes we tried on that looked good end up smelling, like we had just rolled around in pig slop, and are stained, tattered, ripped. We stand before a holy, pure God, who demands that we have clean clothes before we enter his eternal house.

I don’t know about you, but when I look at how many times I have so foolishly tried on the devil’s clothes, it leaves me feeling helpless. I also have this overwhelming sense of hopelessness, because Satan will only improve his skill as a master tailor and will never stop offering new clothes to try on. And I feel despair, and wonder, “How will I ever stand before God with clean clothes?”

The devil used these same tactics on Jesus. The Bible tells us that immediately after Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit led Jesus out into the wilderness. There he was all by himself for 40 days and nights. Jesus was being tempted by the devil the entire time. The gospel writers record just three of those temptations that Satan presented to Jesus.

Just like the kite speaking to the eagle, Satan knew what to say to Jesus. Our text says, “If you are the Son of God,” a better translation would read, “Since you are the Son of God…” Satan never doubted that Jesus was the Son of God. He used Christ’s divinity as part of the temptation. He said to Jesus, “I know that you’ve been fasting the past forty days we’ve been together and you look pretty hungry. Since you are the Son of God, use your divine powers and transform these rocks into bread. Did your Father really say that you can’t use your powers for your own personal benefit? What would it hurt? Besides, he hasn’t provided you with anything out here!”

Just as the devil uses the same tactics in his temptations, so also Jesus uses his own tactics in his defense of Satan’s attacks, “It is written…” The Word of God says this, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” (Deut. 8.3) Those clothes don’t look appealing, Satan, because in spite of my present circumstances, my Father does provide what I need, and he will. I will not doubt him, I have no reason to.

So Satan comes back with, “Ok, Jesus. You and I both know that you came to this realm, my kingdom: to save sinners. And to do that you must suffer and die a horrible death. But I’m going to give you a way out. You can still have the kingdom, and the authority and power, you can still be the king the people are looking for, you can still bring them that freedom you’re promising, freedom from those Romans, and you can rule the world, just bow down and worship me, and I’ll give all that to you, and then don’t you have to go through all of the rejection and pain and suffering, and death. Try these clothes on for size, Jesus.’

Jesus replied, “Those clothes don’t look attractive either, for it is written, ‘Worship the LORD your God and serve him only.’ (Deut 6:13) Besides, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (Matthew 28:18) My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36)

Then Satan lead Jesus to the top of the temple in Jerusalem. “Ok, Jesus, we’re going to do some base jumping, but we’re not going to use parachutes. As you keep saying, ‘It is written,’ ‘God will send his angels, they’ll catch you.’ (Psalm 91:11,12) God wouldn’t break a promise, would he? Test that promise.”

“You’re absolutely correct, but it is also written, ‘Do not test the LORD your God.’” (Deut 6:16)

Each of these temptations was tailor-made, designed just for Jesus – to hit him where he might be most vulnerable. But God’s Word tells us, “He has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15) Because he stood firm against Satan, because he did not once fall into temptation, because he always made every effort to obey his Father’s will (and succeeded!), Jesus wore the robes that the holy and pure God demands from us. Jesus stood before the Father pure and sinless. The Father then turned to you and to me and said, “Try these robes on for size, see how they fit you. They are the robes of my Son’s righteousness.”

Do you know that in the Lutheran church it has been a tradition for over 500 years for parents to bring their newborn child to the baptismal font clothed in a white dress? That white dress symbolizes what is actually happening in baptism – the Holy Spirit creates faith in the child’s heart. Faith receives the washing of sins, the creation of a pure heart. The Holy Spirit dresses that child in a tailor-made robe, that fits perfectly, the robe of Jesus’ righteousness. That’s what God has done for you.

So that we do not become overwhelmed by our great and shameful sins, so that we do not fall into despair, so that we are not hopeless and helpless as we stand before the Father, Jesus promises you and me through holy baptism that the Father sees his Son’s robes of righteousness. They cover over our ragged, torn, smelly clothes. The Father says, “You are forgiven. You are holy and precious in my sight. Do not be afraid. My Son has won the victory over the old evil foe - a victory that is yours through faith.”

New clothes are fun. They are fresh and exciting. It’s something different - a change from the old clothes we use to wear. Jesus’ robes of righteousness bring us something new, too. The writer to the Hebrews says, “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:14-16) Imagine someone who just walked out of the doctor’s office and heard the awful news, “You have cancer.” Even though that individual must go through painful treatment after treatment, and test after test, they are not alone. There are many others who have experienced the same pain, and survived. Those survivors go to that cancer stricken soul and offer hugs, and prayers, and a listening ear and words of encouragement because they’ve been there. They understand. They know what to say.

In the same way, Jesus understands because he’s been there. We know that the devil will continue to offer you clothes to wear, tailored just for you, and he will be relentless. He wants nothing more than to cause you to doubt God and to tear your robe from you. Do not be afraid, my friends. Jesus experienced all of what you face today, and tomorrow and the next day, and he survived. More than that, he was victorious! We will go to him in prayer, because he understands. We will ask for strength. Then we will go to his Word and there we will find strength - strength that comes from his promise that he won the victory for you. That strength will come from his promise that you are covered in his righteousness. Then, we will return to his Word and study his tactics for fighting against Satan, and we will be confident. We will know that Jesus stands with us, and for us. Amen.