

February 22, 2026  
First Sunday in Lent

“Resisting in Faith”

Genesis 3:1-21, Matthew 4:1-11

Immediately after being baptized in the Jordan River by John, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to enter into battle with Satan. Satan takes the offensive, attacking Jesus with various temptations. Jesus, of course, resists these attacks by the Word of God and is victorious. It is no accident that this Gospel lesson account is contrasted by the Old Testament reading of Genesis three where Adam and Eve failed miserably in the face of temptation, as has every other human being since...except for Jesus.

People have said to me and I've had the thought myself that, sure, Jesus resists temptation. But it's easy for Him. He's God!

This was not easy for Jesus. He had fasted for forty days and, great understatement, He was hungry. Jesus is fully a human being. The author of Hebrews tells us, *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”* I know it's hard to imagine, but human beings like the blessings of the world. So did Jesus. Jesus had the same emotions that we do; the same desires. But we tend to think Jesus had a divine strength of will that allowed Him to simply shrug off all the temptations that would take these desires to a sinful place.

It wasn't strength of will. It was faithfulness to the Father. Where Adam, Eve and every other human caves into following their own will and desires, Jesus is perfectly faithful to the Father's will. It's the Father's will that He be hungry and tempted, so Jesus rolls with it. Satan tempts Jesus toward seeking what is clearly against the Father's will, but Jesus won't go there. He remains walking in the will of the Father...all the way to the cross.

So what are we to do with this? You probably have heard it preached or taught that Jesus here has given us an example of how to deal with temptation. Simply run to God's Word! That's what Jesus does each and every time and it works.

Seriously? If that was the trick I'm quite sure we'd have a lot less sinning going on in the world; at least in the church! And we Lutherans know full well that it's the holy law of God that convicts us of sin; not prevents it. No, that's falling into the resisting sin by one's own will and work type of thinking. Yet, this is the type of thinking we prefer because it puts us in the driver's seat and that's where our fallen nature thinks we belong. We like to believe that if we could only figure out the right moves, then we could have the will and the power to resist temptation, you know, like Jesus does.

This is the reason we should not see Jesus as our example here. Okay, yes, we do want to strive to imitate Jesus; He is the perfect example of human love of God and neighbor for sure. But when it comes to defeating sin and temptation, we're crippled. This is the very reason we need a Savior. Jesus struggles with human temptation as we do, but in that humanity is perfectly faithful to God's will and design for our salvation.

And this is really what we should see here. Jesus has come into our flesh to be our warrior and fight the battle that we can't win. It was not easy. Here we see Him suffering hunger and want. We know He goes on to suffer mocking, abuse, torture and death for our sake. During all of it He faced the temptation to save Himself. But God's will is that His creation be redeemed from our sin and saved for His eternal kingdom. Jesus is faithful to the Father. Jesus carries out His will. His faithfulness endures unto victory for our sake.

And while this episode of temptation in the wilderness is all about Jesus and not so much about us, it most certainly should inspire us. No, we cannot resist sin perfectly like Jesus. But by the power of that same Holy Spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness, we can be faithful. Perfectly faithful like Jesus? No. But by the grace of God, that's okay. The author of Hebrews directs us to be *"looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."*

Our faithful lives are lives of continual turning away from sin and towards He who stands victorious over it. In this we of course receive full pardon and reconciliation with the Father. But since this episode is very much pointed toward temptation, it's worth pointing out that faithfulness, not strength of human will, is what we are called to in Christ.

What I mean is this: Many of us think the Christian life is about me trying to be good. We think, "I've got to stop sinning." Admittedly, not a bad thought. But also not possible. And if we're relying on our own strength of will to pull it off, we're going to fail miserably because our will is corrupted by sin.

But if we approach resisting temptation not as an act of will, but as an act of faithfulness, we're not depending on ourselves, we're leaning on Jesus in the midst of trials and temptations. Instead of a question of right and wrong it's more a question of clinging to our Savior; surrendering to His will which we know is best for our eternal lives. It's not a magic bullet, but if we can change our mindset in this manner, I think it a lot more likely we run to God in prayer in the face of trials instead of leaning on our own morality.

The Small Catechism's explanation of the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "And lead us not into temptation," highlights how it is God's strength, not our own, that protects us: "God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that **God would guard and keep us** so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, **we pray** that we may finally overcome them and win the victory."

Clearly see Jesus as your warrior and your victory in your fight against sin, death and the devil. When it comes to temptations in your own life, don't make the mistake of thinking that fight is yours alone. It's not. Jesus has already won the war. Faith in Him gives you that victory and in Him you are enabled to resist the evil one.

And then you don't, and you sin. You still be faithful. You repent...which means "turn". Yes, you failed miserably again, just like Adam and Eve. You turn from that evil you did and back toward the Jesus who won the victory over that very sin you did. It's paid for. It's forgiven.

This is being faithful to God. Your wavering faith is made perfect in He who kept the faith unto victory for you. Keep faith in Jesus. In Him, daily resist temptation to sin, repent of your failures, and endure this struggle until Jesus finally brings His triumph to completion.

Temptation to sin is a given in this fallen world. Resist it, but not by yourself. Resist it in faith in Christ Jesus, your Savior. When you fail, He is still your perfect Savior, so faithfully repent to Him. Then, forgiven, resist temptation some more.

Amen.