

– to use the fish/lure metaphor – “Oh man, I really want to bite that bait.” That’s how lust works, no? And gluttony, and theft, and murder, etc. All covetous thoughts are desires having conceived sin. Those sinful thoughts, if left in unrepentance, will only increase to more and greater shame and vice, as we all know well from experience. Paul teaches in **Romans 6:23**, “**The wages of sin is death.**” Apart from repentance and faith, such death will not only be physical as it happens to every living creature in the universe, but also spiritual – eternal death; separation from God in the confines of hell.

When it comes to your burdens, fellow children of the Heavenly Father, don’t bear them alone. A good friend will hear your struggles and encourage you to remain faithful. **Proverbs 17:17**, “**A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.**” A good friend might not say what you want to hear, but a good friend will say what you need to hear, which is why Solomon also writes, “**Faithful are the wounds of a friend**” (**Pro 27:6**). Sometimes the truth hurts, but the truth leads us to repentance. If you don’t have a good Christian friend in whom you can confide, pray for one, and seek one out! There are plenty of good candidates for friends here! This Church is incredibly blessed with people throughout all age columns! May the Lord open up your heart to find a godly friend. But know this that you do have a pastor who loves you and cares about you, and is called to bear your burdens in confidence, especially the ones you might not want anyone else to know. Pastors vow before the Lord at their Ordination and Installation that they will not divulge anything ever confessed in repentance!

If you are still unsure of him, know that you most certainly have Jesus Christ. “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear” as we sing in the hymn. As Jesus needed angels to minister to him after his temptation in the wilderness, what a blessing it is for the Christian when they have good friends to minister to them in their own times of suffering. And even if friends are lacking, you have the Word of God. **2 Corinthians 1:3-5**, “**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.**”

Thanks be to God for this first Sunday in Lent. If left to our own devices, we would bring forth not only sin, but death upon ourselves! Our flesh is weak. Christ is strong! When the penitent heart sees only the darkness of death, the light of Christ shows us there is life! When all things are left unto Christ, He brings forth not only life, but salvation to be shared by all who believe in Him! Thus our confidence, our hope, our faith is in Christ who said with the surest confidence: “Take a hike, Satan; get out of here. Leave Me alone! BE GONE!” He said what we are otherwise too weak to say. So in the humility of repentance, faith trusts that since Christ overcame all the onslaughts of Satan, He alone could be the sacrifice for our sin, and He was! Jesus overcoming temptation is encouraging and for our comfort. The words of the heavenly Father spoken to Him right before the Spirit led him into the wilderness were proven. Indeed, “This is my beloved Son.” This is Jesus, who not only overcame temptation, but overcame death!

Don’t read this story and think to yourself, “I, too, must overcome temptation, or else I can’t ever be with Jesus.” Read this story and confess, “I too often don’t overcome temptation, and I need Jesus.” Then trust that since Christ has overcome sin, death, and the power of the Devil, by God’s free grace, you will, too. Paul writes in **1 Thessalonians 1:5**, “**Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.**” The sanctified life, that is, the life made holy in Christian living has the power to resist Satan’s temptation. That power comes from the Gospel and is the work of the Holy Spirit. **Romans 1:16**, “**For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.**” And this power is the certain truth our salvation is based on Christ’s merits alone – never ours! As we sang in the Office Hymn: “Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill; they shall not overpower us. This world’s prince may still scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He judged; the deed is done; One little word can fell him.”

“Be gone, Satan!” Be gone – one little word (ὑπάγε) in Greek. One little word fell that swindling serpent. And he left defeated. What power there is in God’s Word! Let us worship the Lord our God and receive Him only who comes to serve us! In Jesus’ name, Amen.