

# Lent 2018 – The Battles of Lent

## "The Battle of Gethsemane"

Text: Mark 14:32-42

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in Jesus Christ, whose suffering and death we once again join to commemorate. Amen.

While we recognize that moral human beings can never begin to plumb the depths of the suffering of our Savior on our behalf, still we try. One means we employ to that end, especially during the season of Lent, is to examine ever more carefully our own sinfulness, for it was our sin that caused our Lord's suffering. Yet there too we fully acknowledge that we fall far short in our grasp of all the ways that we fail to measure up to God's perfect standard on a daily basis. But still we try.

We continue that process, that struggle, this evening as we compare our Lord's faithfulness to our own personal sin and faithlessness, especially this evening his perfection in dealing with temptation compared to our regular failure. The text that will guide us in that pursuit this evening is found recorded in the Gospel of Mark, the 14<sup>th</sup> Chapter, beginning with the 32<sup>nd</sup> verse:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Mark 14:32-42** *And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." <sup>33</sup> And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. <sup>34</sup> And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." <sup>35</sup> And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. <sup>36</sup> And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." <sup>37</sup> And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? <sup>38</sup> Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." <sup>39</sup> And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. <sup>40</sup> And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him. <sup>41</sup> And he came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. <sup>42</sup> Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."*

This is God's Word – the verbally inspired words by which we will seek to be filled and strengthened this evening. That all of the benefits of these

holy words might be ours, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

The theme for our Lenten meditations this year is *The Battles of Lent*. We are revisiting some rather familiar places – places like the Upper Room, the High Priest's Palace, Pilate's Court, and Golgotha – and struggling to recognize them not only as sites of great spiritual battles, but to better understand and appreciate exactly what happened there. It is our prayer that in visiting these places we will once again be reminded not only of what our Lord has done for us, but just how unworthy we truly are of all the mercies he has shown us. This evening we examine the Battle of Gethsemane, recognizing it this evening as an epic struggle against temptation.

It may take a moment, but I would hope that if asked to recite the Sixth Petition we could all do so. Most of us would have to walk through the Lord's Prayer in our minds, counting off the petitions as we went, but eventually we would arrive at the Sixth: *And lead us not into temptation*. The very fact that we might struggle mightily with Luther's explanation of the Sixth Petition might, in itself, identify a slide or deterioration that has taken place in our lives. The catechism was not given to the Church to memorize once for our Confirmation Examination, and then to be discarded. It was meant to be a permanent fixture in our hearts – a weapon or tool that is committed to memory and thereby ready to be used daily, at a moment's notice.

The interesting aspect of the Sixth Petition that we note especially this evening is the fact that Jesus there taught us to pray not just that we be given grace to *overcome* temptation, but that we *never be led into* temptation in the first place. He repeated that same truth to the sleepy disciples in our text for this evening when he said to them, **"Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."** The key element of both the Sixth Petition and this statement in our text is that Jesus is teaching us that the best way to overcome temptation is to *simply avoid it – to run from it*. Stop for a moment and think about that. Is your thinking in line with Jesus' words here? Is your attitude about temptation in harmony with Jesus' will for your life?

A very real problem presents itself here, doesn't it? While Jesus talked of *avoiding* temptation, we tend to think in terms of entering into temptation, but somehow *surviving* it. There is obviously a big difference between the two. Our perception of temptation is that it is inevitable. In a certain sense it is. Life in a sinful world, where the devil prowls about like a lion, will be filled with temptation. The difference between our Lord

and us is, first of all, that he advocated prayer and watchfulness with the intent that we flee even the temptation itself, to say nothing of the sin that most often results. We tend to dismiss temptation, even walking boldly into it, all the while hoping to survive the battle that it brings. The result is that we fail far more often than we would if we followed Jesus' plan.

The difference between our approach to temptation and that of our Savior is undoubtedly the natural byproduct of our lax attitude towards sin. Jesus recognized the true horror of sin. We tend to downplay its seriousness. We play a mental game with ourselves, flirting with sin rather than slamming the door in its face. It may well be that we don't always consciously *intend* to sin, but we seem to enjoy toying with the temptation, somehow thrilling to the danger of the situation. If we truly regarded sin with the same attitude that Jesus held, we would be much more adamant about avoiding even the temptation. If we were always and only horrified at the thought of committing any act whatsoever that was not in complete harmony with God's will, we would never allow ourselves to be placed unnecessarily in harm's way.

Need further evidence of just how dangerous this tendency of ours really is? Suppose Jesus had adopted our attitude towards temptation? Imagine if Jesus, instead of spending that time in heartfelt, agonized prayer with his Father in the Garden, had initiated talks with the Jewish leaders about how they might reach some sort of a compromise to avoid the hostilities that existed between them. You will recall that this was a very real offer made to Jesus by the Jewish leaders. They made it clear that they would be content to leave Jesus alone if he would just leave them alone. They would grant him his followers if he would turn a blind eye to their work righteousness. If Jesus would agree to pose no threat to them, if he would agree never to condemn them, they would have allowed him his meager following.

But that would have been exactly contrary to Jesus' entire life and mission, wouldn't it? In fact if such a thing would have been an option for Jesus, he never would have left heaven in the first place. He came to this earth to save us – to engage in mortal combat with sin, death and Satan. He came, in other words, to *destroy* their power, not to seek peaceful coexistence with it. Jesus knew full well that mankind had one chance and one chance only to avoid an eternity in hell. Jesus compromising with those who promoted work righteousness would have been like a fireman giving matches and gasoline to a pyromaniac. He would have been supporting the very thing he came to destroy. Would you have wanted Jesus to toy with that temptation?

Yet do not imagine for an instant that the temptation wasn't there for Jesus to abandon us in favor of an easier path. When he suffered as he did in the Garden, it was not the suffering of a man afraid of physical pain or human rejection; it was the suffering of the Son of God who knew what lay ahead of him. It was the torment of a man who knew that he was about to be separated from his Father; a man who knew he was about to receive from that Father the full wrath and fury that was appropriate for the commission of every single sin ever committed. In this the Savior's own knowledge and understanding worked against him. He knew what lay in store. He recognized, before the fact, the utter horror of what he soon would have to endure.

Knowing as he did just what lay ahead for him, imagine the temptation that must have beckoned him. Imagine how Jesus must have longed to identify a different path. Hear the torment in his own words as he prayed, "**Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.**"

Those who undergo hip or knee replacements smile at those who lament the pain they must have endured as a result of such surgery. They are amused because the pain of the surgery is typically nothing compared to the pain that the malfunctioning joint had caused them for years. In much the same way Jesus must shake his head incredulously each time we lament his physical suffering during his trial and crucifixion, to the exclusion of the spiritual. I would suggest that the physical pain was the least of Jesus' concerns. Jesus was anything but a coward or a sissy. He did not spend those terrible moments in the Garden because he was afraid of the thorns and nails - the physical pain he was about to endure. That pain, he surely knew, was as nothing compared to the outpouring of divine wrath that he was about to suffer on our behalf.

Think of it this way. How great do you imagine would be the suffering you would have to endure in hell, for an eternity, as a result of all your sins – had Jesus not rescued you from that curse? Multiply that suffering by the number of human beings who ever had or ever would exist on the earth. *That* is the suffering Jesus endured, for "**the Lord has laid on him (Jesus) the iniquity of us all.**" We simply cannot comprehend such a thing. We can only stand in awe of the love our Savior must have had for us to willingly carry such a burden in our place. But carry it he did. The result is our eternal escape. You and I will never know such suffering because of what our Lord did for us.

Not all temptation can be avoided. Jesus said as much in Matthew 18:7, "**Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that**

**temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!"** That, in fact, was the battle Jesus fought in Gethsemane. Like the Upper Room, Gethsemane was not the peaceful setting we might imagine. It was a battlefield, and the mortal conflict there was between our Savior and Satan. While in the Upper Room the devil's attack came in the form of selfishness or self-service, in the Garden it was temptation itself. The devil's one hope, in his bid to destroy both God's Son and the human souls that he loves, was to persuade Jesus to avoid the horror he knew was coming, and to search instead for an alternate path or compromise. Since there *was* no other path, and to compromise was to fail, Jesus could not accept the devil's compromise, yet it is worth noting that there was no way for him *to avoid the inevitable temptation itself*. He had to meet it, struggle mightily against it, and defeat it. Or all would have been lost.

While you and I certainly need to do a better job of *avoiding* temptation, from the Battle of Gethsemane we learn how to deal with the temptations *that are unavoidable*. Note well how Jesus fought and won this Battle. His most obvious example was to spend time with his Father in prayer. He also here disabused us of the defeatist attitude that we are powerless to resist temptation. In 1 Corinthians 10:13 Paul wrote, **"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."** Falling or yielding to temptation is not unavoidable. God *always* gives us a means of escape, but that means of escape is often a gentle, quiet voice that we have the power to ignore. Look for that means of escape. Listen for it. It will always be there.

The lesson our Savior would teach us this evening then is this: Watch carefully for temptation and run from it whenever possible. When that is not possible, look for help in the divine words of your Bible and take the problem to your God in prayer. And then grab hold of the escape that he will surely provide. Jesus, by winning every one of his battles, has freed us from our slavery to sin. God help us to live as those who have been freed, as those who have been saved. Amen.

# Weekly Hymn and Sermon Schedule

**February 14**

Hymns: 140 (1-4)  
367, 263

**Lenten Theme:**  
"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of the  
Upper Room"*

Text: John 13:1-17

**February 21**

Hymns: 388 (1-3, 6)  
143 (1-5), 261

**Lenten Theme:**  
"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of  
Gethsemane"*

Text: Mark 14:32-42

**February 28**

Hymns: 358, 171 (1-5)  
260 (1, 4 & 6)

**Lenten Theme:**  
"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of the  
High Priest's  
Palace"*

Text: Mark 14:53-64

**March 7**

Hymns: 652, 371 (1-6)  
258 (1, 3-5)

Lenten Theme:

"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of  
Pilate's Court"*

Text: Mark 15:1-15

**March 14**

Hymns: 360, 155  
463 (1-2, 8)

Lenten Theme:

"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of the  
Streets of  
Jerusalem"*

Text: Luke 23:26-31

**March 21**

Hymns: 153, 176  
448 (1-2, 5)

Lenten Theme:

"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of  
Golgotha"*

Text: Mark 15:22-32



## St Paul Lutheran Church

### Lent 2018

"The Battles of Lent"

- The Upper Room
- Gethsemane
- The High Priest's Palace
- Pilate's Court
- The Streets of Jerusalem
- Golgotha

**-Please return this bulletin to the Entry Table for use next week-**

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## Mid-Week Lenten Services - 2018

**The Opening Hymn** (As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)

### Invocation

**Pastor:** *In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

**All:** (Spoken) *Amen.*

### Confession and Absolution (TLH 323)

**Pastor:** *Acknowledging that we stand in the presence of our Holy God we humble ourselves, and in true repentance, we confess our sins:*

**All:**

1. With broken heart and contrite sigh, a trembling sinner, Lord, I cry.  
Thy pardoning grace is rich and free - O God, be merciful to me.
2. I smite upon my troubled breast, with deep and conscious guilt oppressed;  
Christ and His cross my only plea – O God, be merciful to me.
3. Nor alms nor deeds that I have done can for a single sin atone.  
To Calvary alone I flee – O God, be merciful to me.

**Pastor:** *Jesus Christ himself has been punished for your sins. God the Father has placed upon Jesus the iniquity of us all. According to His authority, and by His command, I announce to you the divine decree of our God that all of your sins are forgiven, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

**All:** And when, redeemed from sin and hell, with all the ransomed throng I dwell,  
My blissful song shall ever be: God has been merciful to me.

### The Reading of the Passion History

#### The Apostolic Creed

I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,  
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Christian Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

**The Pre Sermon Hymn** (As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)

**The Sermon** – *The theme for our devotions this Lenten Season is*

### **"The Battles of Lent"**

*(Please turn to the back page for this evening's service details)*

**The Response** – (Sung to the melody of Hymn 237)

1. *A mighty Fortress is our God, a trusty Shield and Weapon;  
He helps us free from every need that hath us now o'ertaken.  
The evil Foe means deadly woe;  
Great guile and might his arms in fight;  
On Earth is not his equal.*
2. *With might of ours can naught be done, soon were our loss effected;  
But for us fights the Valiant One, Whom God Himself elected.  
This Lord of Hosts is Jesus Christ;  
Our Savior-King, our Mighty God.  
He holds the field forever.*

### The Prayer of the Day

#### The Lord's Prayer

#### The Benediction

**P:** *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
And the love of God the Father,  
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

**C:** *Amen, Amen, Amen.* (Sung by all)

**The Closing Hymn** (As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)

#### Silent Prayer

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### Announcements

*[All are invited to remain for fellowship and light refreshments.]*