

Joshua 7:19-26

Dear Friends in Christ,

On this first Sunday in Lent we are reminded that temptation is all around us. When the Devil left Jesus after tempting him for 40 days in the desert, he didn't leave him for good. Luke says that he left him until an opportune time. If Satan didn't give up on Jesus, he certainly isn't going to give up on us. As we consider how Achan gave in to temptation and how Jesus resisted temptation we learn some important truths about ourselves and our salvation.

First we need some background so that we can better understand what Joshua is telling us about Achan. The people of Israel had just won a great victory. They had captured and destroyed the great and powerful walled city of Jericho. You remember the story. For seven days Israel marched around the city of Jericho, once each day. Then on the seventh day they marched around seven times. When they finished they blew their trumpets and shouted and the great walls of Jericho collapsed.

Before they attacked God had given them some very specific instructions. He told them **keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury.** This was a reminder to them that they had not captured the city by their own power, but that God had given them the victory. Joshua had made God's instructions clear and he thought that they had been followed.

The next city that needed to be captured was called Ai. Joshua had received a report from his military intelligence that Ai was not a very strong city and they would only need to send a small force to capture it, the whole army of Israel would not have to go. But, when this small force attacked Ai they were soundly defeated and 36 Israelite soldiers were killed. Joshua and the people couldn't understand what had happened. They had conquered the great city of Jericho with no trouble, but they were defeated by the little, weak city of Ai.

One of the reasons that they were unable to capture Ai was that they got cocky. They thought that Ai would be a piece of cake. They forgot who had given them the victory over Jericho, that it wasn't their great military prowess, but the hand of God that had given them victory. It seems that they thought that they could handle Ai all on their own, by their own strength. It doesn't even seem that they took the time to inquire of God about this battle.

We can identify with this tactic of Satan, can't we? When things are going well in our lives we find ourselves getting a little cocky. We find ourselves thinking that we have everything under control. We forget who is really in charge. Maybe we grow a little lax in our prayer life. Maybe we aren't very faithful in our worship attendance or our private devotional life. We think that because things are going well God will just continue to bless us no matter what we do. But that's playing into Satan's temptation to put God to the test.

In the Gospel lesson we saw Satan trying to get Jesus to put God to the test. Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and told him to jump off trusting that God would protect him because God had promised to give his angels charge over him. But we see Jesus standing in our place, resisting and defeating this temptation of Satan because we don't always resist it. He recognized what Satan was trying to do as he misquoted and misapplied Scripture. He refused to put God to the test.

Israel became cocky and tested God by not checking with him first before they attacked Ai. If they had inquired of God first, they might have learned of another reason for their defeat. Now, after their defeat at Ai, as Joshua went to the Lord in prayer, God made it clear that an even

stronger reason for their defeat at Ai was that someone had disobeyed his instructions regarding Jericho. Someone had taken some of the devoted things for themselves. Because those devoted things that were supposed to be set aside for destruction were in Israel's camp God now considered Israel liable for destruction as well.

Through a process of casting lots God indicated who the guilty party was. First one of the twelve tribes was singled out, then one family in that tribe, and finally an individual was singled out. I'm sure that the tutors and dorm moms, or parents with two or more children might wish that God would do this for them. It was Achan who had brought defeat on Israel and was actually responsible for the deaths of 36 soldiers, all because he had taken some of the devoted things from Jericho for himself.

As it became evident that he was going to be discovered it would have been good for Achan to step forward on his own and admit what he had done. He must have been under the delusion that he would not be discovered, but nothing is hidden from God. How we need to remember that fact!

When he was singled out by lot as the guilty person Joshua urged him to come clean, to confess what exactly what he had done. Notice how he describes his sin. He says that as he went through the rubble of Jericho he saw a beautiful Babylonian robe, a robe fit for a king. And he saw near it some gold and silver. He coveted these things for himself and he acted on that sinful desire. He took them for himself and hid them under his tent; seemingly with the full knowledge of his family.

How often Satan uses this same tactic on us! When we see an ad on TV Satan is right there telling us that we need to have whatever is being advertised. If someone ahead of us in the check out line drops \$10 on the floor, Satan is right there telling us, "finders keepers, losers weepers." If your neighbor gets a new vehicle or a new piece of machinery Satan is right there telling you that you need to have a bigger, better, newer, more powerful one. Satan loves to fan the covetousness of our sinful nature into flames; and all too often, like Achan, like David who coveted Bathsheba, like Ahab who coveted Naboth's vineyard, we not only sin by coveting, but we act on those sinful desires.

Satan tried to get Jesus to covet. He showed him all the kingdoms of the world and promised to give him all their riches and power and glory if only he would bow down to him. But again, we see Jesus standing in our place. We see him being tempted just as we are every day, yet Jesus remained without sin. He resisted the lure of earthly things. He kept his father and the mission of winning our salvation his number one priority. He worshiped the Lord and served him alone.

There's one more thing that we can see in Achan's sin. We see how Satan tries to get us to focus only on ourselves. We see how Satan works to convince us that what we do won't affect anyone else and to put our needs and wants above anyone and anything else.

We can identify with the way that Achan must have justified his actions. When he saw that beautiful robe fit for a king, and that gold and silver, he knew what was supposed to happen to them. The robe was supposed to be burned with everything else in Jericho, and the gold and silver was to go into the Lord's treasury. He must have thought, "What a waste! Why should such a beautiful robe be burned in the fire? Who is going to know if I take these things for myself? Who is going to miss them? The owners are dead. Why shouldn't someone else enjoy these things, and why shouldn't it be me?"

All too often in our world today, among Christians, we hear such justification for sin. We hear it in the phrase, "God wants me to be happy, doesn't he?" I'm sure you have heard people use that phrase, maybe you have said it yourself, or at least had it cross your mind. But God makes it

clear that choosing sin, going against his will, is never the way that he provides out of temptation. It's never the way to true happiness. You've seen how it ended for Achan.

Satan tried this tactic on Jesus too. After Jesus had fasted for 40 days he was hungry, and that's obviously an understatement. He was starving. Satan tempted him to turn stones into bread so that he would have something to eat. He could have said to Jesus, "surely the Father wouldn't want you to starve to death! What would be so wrong with satisfying your hunger, taking care of a basic necessity of life?"

But again, Jesus standing in our place, as our substitute under God's law, resisted the temptation to put his own needs and desires above God's will. He let Satan and us know that there is nothing in this world more important than God and his word for man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Like Achan, we sin. We give into temptation more often than we would like to admit. When we do, like Achan, we will confess our sins. We will confess the truth, "I have sinned against the LORD and this is what I did." Achan faced dire consequences as a result of his sin, and so may we. But God promises that **if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

God can forgive us and does forgive us because of what Jesus did in our place. He resisted every temptation of Satan. He never once gave in to temptation. And because he was without sin, as we see him on the cross we are assured that he was suffering in our place. Because he had no sins of his own he was able to be punished for your sins and for mine. Every one of our sins has been paid for in full.

As we begin the Lenten season we see Satan at work. We see Achan giving in to temptation and the terrible consequences it brought on Israel and on himself and his family. We see that Satan is at work on us, constantly tempting us to give in to sin; doing everything he can so that we end up with him in Hell. But, by God's grace, we see Jesus standing in our place, resisting every temptation so that he could go to the cross and pay for all of our sins. May this fact strengthen our resolve to resist temptation with God's help, and when we fall, move us to confess our sins and rejoice in the forgiveness Jesus has won for us.