

Not Just a Perfect Example

Text: Matthew 4:1-11

Hymn: "O Love, How Deep" (*LSB* 544)

A role model is someone you look up to, someone that lived his or her life in such a way you want to imitate it. A role model sets a good model for others to follow. We all have people we look up to. For someone it may be your father or mother, for others maybe your grandparents or a teacher or a friend. For some of you, it may even be a sports star or a musician. We all have them. We all to some extent wish we could be more like them. But as inspiring as role models can be, they can't make you like them.

When I was growing up, a lot of kids wanted to be like Michael Jordan. There was even a Gatorade commercial campaign, "Be Like Mike." But Michael Jordan never made anybody like himself. He didn't transfer all his basketball skills to a room full of elementary schoolers, as much as they may have hoped he would.

Role models are wonderful examples. And they give us all something to aspire to and work towards. They're of great use as a standard for how far we've come and for how far we've still got to go. But that being the case, role models always come to us in the way of the law. They show us the various methods to be more like them. They hold out a standard, a very high standard, and then when we don't live up to it, we realize we're not like them. Tom Lehrer used to say how sobering it was to consider that when Mozart was his age, he had already been dead for a year.

It is one of Satan's greatest temptations to turn Jesus into a role model. Satan would have you believe that Jesus is simply an example for you to follow. And today's Gospel reading can easily be misunderstood and misinterpreted to be just this. Think for yourself, If Jesus is just an example, then when Satan comes with his temptations,

all you have to do is quote some Scriptures from Deuteronomy and you'll win the day. If Jesus is just an example, then the key to defeating Satan is just knowing more Scripture than he does. And if Jesus is the example, then there's nothing He can really do for you. Sure, He can encourage you or teach you or motivate you, whip you into shape, but unless you follow this Jesus, His model, His methods, His examples, you're dead. If Jesus is simply a role model and an example, then He is simply a Law Jesus who sets a standard for you that isn't just high; it's unreachable!

If your Jesus is simply a role model, a wonderful example to the righteous life, if yours is a what-would-Jesus-do sort of Jesus, then you don't have the right One, at least not the one the Scriptures speak of. Jesus doesn't simply model the good life and show us techniques for proper living. If Jesus were simply an example and a model, then He would be no good to us at all. None of us, try as we might, can consistently follow His lead. None of us can follow those techniques to perfection.

Fortunately, our Gospels tell us of a Jesus that is much more than an example. They give us a Jesus who actually delivers Himself for us. Just look at these three temptations that Satan places before Christ. The first temptation comes while Jesus is hungry. He's just gone forty days and forty nights without eating any food. So the devil tempts Him in His weakness. He comes to Him in His hunger. "If you are the Son of God, then command these stones to become bread." This temptation speaks to immediate gratification. It's a temptation for Jesus to use His power to alleviate His own hunger, to make life more comfortable for Himself. Satan tempts Jesus away from suffering, away from weakness and pain, away from death. But Christ goes the way of the Cross. And so Jesus refutes Satan's temptation by quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3,

“Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Jesus would rather suffer the death of His body than give up the Word of God.

The second temptation again tries to have Jesus in the way of power, in the way of miracles and glory. “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down.” This time Satan even quotes Scripture to Jesus by quoting the Psalms: “He will command His angels concerning and on their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone.” But again Jesus walks the way of humility. He hides His power. He hides His glory. He hides His being the Son of God. And in so doing, He lets Himself be ridiculed. He opens Himself up to the accusation, “Well, you must not be the Son of God if you don’t do these things.”

Then comes the third temptation, where Satan quits beating around the bush and finally bribes Jesus, “All the kingdoms of the world and all of their glory will I give to you, if you only just fall down and worship me.” But again our Lord walks the way of humility. He would rather forfeit all of the kingdoms of this world and forfeit all of their glory than forfeit the worship of his Heavenly Father.

In each of these temptations Jesus resists Satan with the Word of God, “Again it is written.” And in each of these temptations we fail. We always look to satisfy our immediate gratification. We always test God. We always seek worldly glory and power and might rather than to worship the true God in humility and in weakness. If Jesus is our example here, we’ll quickly become frustrated. I can’t live up to that Jesus, you’ll say. But again this is not what Jesus is up to in the wilderness. He is not offering you an example to follow. He is not giving you a hero of the faith or a role model. In each of these temptations, Jesus is standing in that place for you. In each of these, He is

resisting the devil for you. He is conquering Satan and all of his evil temptations for you, because He knows you can't do it yourself. And so Jesus suffers these temptations in the stead and the place of Israel as well. Remember back to when they came out of Egypt. It was Israel that walked through those parted seas, those baptismal waters of the Red Sea and into the wilderness for forty years, being tempted. It was Israel that cried out in their hunger for bread and meat and water. It was the people of Israel that put God to the test at the waters of Meribah. It was the people of Israel who, when they entered the Promised Land, decided that they would rather have the glories of the kingdom around them than worship the one true God.

So here we have Jesus undoing what Israel of old failed to do. Here we have Jesus standing up and resisting the temptations of Satan where Israel failed. Here we have Jesus trusting the Word of God and His promises even when it causes Him to suffer, even when it causes Him to enter the way of the Cross than to seek His glory. This Jesus always comes in the way of Cross. He always suffers Himself to be tempted and tried and questioned and yet He always resists temptation, not just as an example for us to follow, but He resists temptation for us and in our place and instead of us, because He knows we can't do it. He goes the way of the Cross for us. He was led into the wilderness for us, He was placed on the pinnacle of the temple for us, and He was led up onto a very high mountain for us. And in all this He destroyed the Tempter and all of his temptations for us. You are now free. You are forgiven. The Lord does much more for you than give you an example for you to follow. He actually steps into your temptations and He delivers them for you by forgiving you, by saying, "Go, you are

free.” He gives you Himself, He gives you His body and blood, His soul and divinity. He gives all of this for you. Jesus goes the way of the Cross for you.

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