

James 1:12-18  
"Our Daily Battle"  
First Sunday in Lent (B)

February 18, 2024  
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.  
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

***"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life"*** (James 1:12).

Every day of yours and my life is a life under temptation. From the lure of the cookie jar to the draw of pornography. From gossip that we long to share to the grudge that we desire to nurse. From the fallen world, as it tempts our sinful nature into believing that cohabitation is a "test" for marriage compatibility instead of proclaiming the holy estate of marriage as good. From being tempted by friends to drink underage at a party to being tempted to turn to drugs in order to "take away" the pain. From the temptation of the latest fads and trends to be popular all the way to homosexuality and transgenderism. From the worldly temptation of "Sunday Funday" in choosing sinful pleasure over God and His gifts in His Means of Grace.

Day by day, our minds are not at peace. We are at war with ourselves, with the fallen world, and with a cunning devil. To this we say, ***"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,"*** as Jesus teaches us to pray.

This morning, on this First Sunday in Lent, we see before us our daily enemies: evil, temptation, Satan, and sin. Daily we are at war against these lethal spiritual terrorists. But also daily, we have delivery from these evil foes through our Lord Jesus Christ who gives us the crown of life.

Now, it would be certainly nice if we didn't have to battle temptation, but we live in a fallen world, so this is what we face day-in and day-out. We face temptation. Every single day we each face temptation. Why are we in this daily battle? Is it God tempting us?

To this, through the Holy Spirit, James says: ***"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one"*** (James 1:13).

So, if it's not God, then who is tempting us?

To this, James says: ***“Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire”*** (James 1:14). It’s sin. It’s the fallen world. It’s the devil. It’s your sinful desires.

Every day, we are under assault from our evil foes. Satan uses his human and demonic allies to try to distract us, trade our spiritual treasures for trash, sell our future for immediate gratification, grow tired of the Word of God, chase illusions, or to despair of any living communication or relationship with God.

And when you or I are tempted, this gives birth to sin.

When you are running late to something, how do you usually drive? Do you follow the speed limit? Or do you *ever* follow the speed limit? Or do you always give or take 5-8 miles per hour?

As you speed, what happens when you see those red and blue lights flashing behind you? What are your first thoughts? And be honest. Is it, “I know what I did” or is it, “Why did that cop have to be there?” Be honest.

As that cop walks up to your car, you and I most likely become like Adam and Eve in the Garden. We would like to blame anyone but yourself. *“The woman whom you gave to be with me. It’s her fault!” “That serpent deceived me!”* (Genesis 3:11-13).

It is not God, but our own sinfulness, the fallen world, and Satan that tempts us. We are so easily seduced to take “other gifts,” such as travel time via speeding. We are so hesitant to blame ourselves, but instead everyone else around us.

We want immediate gratification. We want to chase illusions. We want our lusts fulfilled. We want money and possessions at any cost.

But really, pastor, is temptation such a big deal? Am I really hurting myself and others if I give in to temptation?

Yes, temptation is a big deal. As St. James states: ***“Desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death”*** (James 1:15). The end result of temptation and evil desire is eternal death. The awful consequence of letting sinful desires take over us is eternal death.

Temptation is a problem. Temptations are evil suggestions to our hearts and minds to rebel against God's will. Now, God certainly allows hardships, but His purpose is always good. His purpose is to test our faith as genuine and to draw us closer to Him, and away from our evil foes. God never, ever, wants His children to choose evil. He never wants us to give in to temptation.

Again, our temptation problem is not from God, but is really from within. Cooking way in each person's heart is a sinful self, a prideful self, that never wants to be converted. This prideful self seeks to dominate our thinking and our values. And it will never submit to God.

Even if we realize our struggle with temptation, feel guilty when we fall into it, or we make up our minds to defeat temptation, we can't. And we won't. We fail when we trust in ourselves to overcome any temptation. We fail 100 percent of the time.

But Christ overcomes temptation, sin, and death to give us the Father's good gifts: the crown of life.

The first verse of our epistle today is: ***"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him"*** (James 1:12). Now, who is "the man" who remains steadfast under trial? It can't be me or you. This man is none other than Jesus Christ, since He is the blessed Man who best resisted temptation. He alone remained steadfast under trial.

Jesus knows what trial is. Jesus knows what temptation is. Not only was He tempted by Satan as we heard in today's Gospel reading; He was tempted even more than that. His greatest temptation was to avoid the cross, not to go to the cross to save you and me, not to suffer the trials that He faced. He was tempted to not suffer and die for you and for me. But He overcame that temptation. He went to the cross for you and for me to pay for all the times we fall into temptation. He is the only One who can defeat temptation for us.

Through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, we belong to God. We are His treasured possessions. He loves us. God the Father loves us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us. So, that through Jesus, we have forgiveness for all the times we have fallen into temptation. It is through Jesus Christ alone that we stand the test and receive the crown of life.

We stand the test as a Baptized child of the heavenly Father. We stand the test by living a life of repentance. We submit to God's Law, which convicts and condemns our sinful hearts and crushes our sinful pride. Through Baptism, Christ's saving Gospel clings to us and alone can give us worth and hope before God. For it is only God's verdict of not guilty that will spare us from His divine wrath that will fall upon Satan and all evil on the Last Day.

As Baptized Christians, whatever hinders us from faith in Christ must go; but the things that bind us to Christ – *His Word and Sacraments* – must be the center of our lives.

Daily, we face temptations. We face temptations from the fallen world, Satan, and from within us – our sinful desires. And since, we cannot create paradise on earth, God alone gives us the way to fight off every temptation. He feeds us with His Word, which sustains us. He strengthens you in His promises of His constant presence, sympathy, and understanding of what you are going through, because He has been there. His victory is your victory, and even if you fail, He will pick you up. He picks you up, forgives you, and prepares you by the power of His Word to strengthen your faith for the next time temptation comes. He does the same thing through His Holy Supper. There, He is feeding you with Himself – *His very body and blood* – that suffered and was shed for you. He strengthens your faith, forgives your sins, and gives you the crown of life.

God knows all about trials and temptations. He knows about being attacked by our evil foes on all sides. Yet, He always remained steadfast under trial – even unto death.

The Holy Spirit leads us recognize, honestly and humbly, the enemy that can and will conceive and give birth to evil thoughts, evil words, and evil desires. He leads us to humbly repent of our sins daily as we receive His forgiveness.

God knows what we all go through. That is why He sent His only Son to suffer those trials and temptations, so that we can get through ours by clinging to Him and receive the crown of life that Jesus has won for you at the cross and the empty tomb. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**