

Sermon Title: “Tempted or Tested?”

February 21st, 2021 – 1st Sunday in Lent

Text: James 1:12-18

Theme:

What’s in it for me?

Sermon Text:



Grace and Peace to you from our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Welcome to the first Sunday in Lent. Sort, of. Sundays are not actually considered part of Lent, because Sunday is always an Easter celebration. That is why the 40 days of Lent don’t include Sundays.

Have you ever stopped to look back at your spiritual journey? Most of you were baptized as infants, grew up in Sunday School, attended confirmation, got married, and had children of your own, and the cycle begins again. But have you ever stopped to look at how far you have come in your walk with Jesus? We’ll take another look at that in a bit, but there are many challenges we’ve all encountered in our lives, sometimes called “trials and tribulations,” and we sometimes may wonder who is tempting us or testing us.

The author to our Epistle today went on quite a spiritual journey himself. James, AKA Yakob (Jacob) was Jesus’ eldest half-brother. While the family was very pious, observing the sabbath, holy festivals and customs, but when Jesus returned to Nazareth, James and the family rejected Jesus, even though they should have been able to recognize Jesus for who He really is, the promised Messiah.

So, it was only after Jesus’ resurrection from the dead that James realized who Jesus really was, but once he saw Jesus resurrected, James responded appropriately joining the Disciples and quickly rising to one of the early leaders in the Church. The High Priest, taking advantage of a lack of Roman Governorship, arrested James and pushed him off the Temple wall

and then he was stoned and beaten to death. His ossuary (bone box) has been discovered, but no remains were found inside.

James was also one of the first to write an Epistle to assist other believers in their walk with Jesus. Martin Luther, initially called it an “Epistle of Straw,” but eventually warmed up to it. Our selection today discusses how Christians should respond to persecution and adversity. James wants us to know that God does not tempt us, only Satan does that. God will test us, as we see in our Old Testament Lesson, but as we see in our Gospel lesson, it is Satan who tempts.

Satan tempts us to commit some kind of sin. He knows us well and knows just what will make us sin and when to tempt us. Temptation comes from our own desires. Maybe it's money, power, lust, or ego. Or in James' day, denying Jesus in order to get the torture to stop. Sadly, there are Christians today that are subjected to torture and persecution to try to force them to recant their faith or adopt another faith, such as Islam. Jesus did warn us about that one, and He did say that those who confess His name before men, He would also do before His Father. Jesus also said he would deny those before His Father that denied Him before man. Temptation leads to sin, and sin leads to death. It's that simple. Even those Christians who recanted their faith still had no guarantee of safety. Some of them were killed anyway, and those who repented of their denial of their faith were subjected to years of brutal penance before the Church would readmit them. They even had a name for those folks, the Lapsi.

So how do we know if God is testing us, or we are being tempted by Satan? Ask yourself a few questions.

1. Is this originating from my own desires?
 - a. If this is coming from something that we want, that is a red flag.
 - b. If God is testing us, it comes from Him, and He is trying to teach us something and guide us.
2. Does what I am being asked to do go against Scripture?
 - a. God has given us His Word for a reason. There are a lot of people out there who claim to be from God, but when they are examined against

God's Word, they don't stack up. God's Word is much more reliable than "What feels right."

3. Does what I am being asked to do harm my relationship with God?
 - a. God will never ask you to do something that is contrary to His Word. He loves you and wants to deepen His relationship with you through Jesus.
4. Does what I am being asked to do harm my relationship with my neighbor?
 - a. This is a tough one. Sometimes doing the right thing means that you lose friends. That's the way it goes sometimes, but God will not ask you to do something that is harmful to other people. He loves them too and wants them to be saved too.

James also reminds us that every good and perfect gift comes from God, not Kay Jewelers, not Walmart, and not the mall. God knows what we need, and He provides it before we even realize that we need it. After all, He is the one who created us. We should remember this and respond with gratitude. We do this by coming to worship God, repenting of our sins, receiving His Word and Sacraments, and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

This last year, we have been tempted and tested. The pandemic and pastoral vacancy has tested our faith, and I think we have found out how important our faith, along with our brothers and sisters in Christ are to us. This is like an extended family to many of us. These challenges threatened to rip us apart, but instead we turned to God and today we are a stronger congregation than we were a year ago. I see a lot of bright days ahead of us. I am truly excited to be working with Pastor Greg.

But there were also a lot of temptations. It would have been really easy to just close our doors. It would have been really easy to play the blame game for all of our woes. It would have been really easy to stop coming to church, using the excuse of the pandemic. But you stayed strong. We picked up the pieces and while we were banged up and bruised, we did not break. We remained faithful. Not only did we support each other, but we were able to give support to others who needed those prayers and support. I don't know if I'll ever fully realize how much these services have meant to people, particularly in the early days of the pandemic, but I know they helped people hang on during some very difficult times. It's very humbling to think about it, and I still get a little choked up thinking about it. This year has been incredibly challenging for

me, but also a blessing. Last year, I would have never guessed I would have been able to keep going like I have had to do.

That brings me to our fifth question, “Does this improve my relationship with God, or does it detract from it?” Without question our shared experience over the last year have strengthened our relationship with God and our brothers and sisters. I am excited about working with Pastor Greg, and I know there we are going to get even stronger as a congregation because of it. We’ve learned to take on more roles and responsibilities. We’ve had to roll up our sleeves, when in the past, the Pastor would have taken care of it, but like me, I bet God showed you that you could do something you never thought you could. God has led us through this trial, and He is with us every step of the way. I can’t wait to see what He has in store for us next.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

Timothy Quindt,
Licensed Lay Deacon
(503) 358-0770
tquindt@hotmail.com

Quotations from Scripture come from:

Various Authors. *The Lutheran Study Bible*. Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.