

The First Sunday in Lent March 10, 2019

Our Savior's Way
Worshiping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Mann

It was hunting season and four guys, Christian friends, were out in the woods together spending the night in a hunting cabin. As they were talking together they decided to tell each other their biggest temptation. The first said, "Well, it's kind of embarrassing, but I struggle with online pornography." "My temptation is worse," the second guy said. "I am addicted to online betting. I can't stop gambling." "Mine is even worse than that," said the third guy. "Sometimes I can't stop drinking." The fourth guy was quiet. "Guys," he said, "I hate to say this, but my temptation is the worst of all. I love to gossip and if you'll excuse me, I need to make some phone calls." Maybe you think your particular temptation is the worst of all. But we all deal with temptation. Oscar Wilde once said, "I can resist anything but temptation." So, this morning, let's talk about temptation.

What is temptation? "Temptation is the desire to do what you should not do." Or more specifically—"Temptation is Satan's invitation to go beyond the boundaries that God has set for us." Two things to notice here—First Satan and God; good and evil. There is a battle going on. Satan wants us; God wants us. Who's going to win? The second thing to notice is that temptation itself is not sin. Even Jesus was tempted. But there's a fine line. In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that if you look at a beautiful woman long enough, you commit adultery in your heart. If you harbor angry feelings against another person, you commit

murder in your mind. So, watch out! When you get close to that line, step back!

Here's a definition of temptation from James 1:14-15—***“Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”*** Do you see the source of temptation?—Desire. But here's the thing—our desires are God-given. God wants them to be a blessing. But Satan takes the desire for intimacy and invites us to cross the boundaries God gives us for sexuality. And Satan takes the satisfaction we receive from enjoying a good meal and tempts us to overeat. And Satan tempts us to gossip (by gossip I mean saying anything derogatory or unloving said about another person—whether it's true or not). Satan takes that strong need we have for self-esteem and twists it and uses it in a way that damages others and displeases God.

Then it gets worse! Satan is clever! He personally tailors the temptations he sends our way so that they are unique to us. Jesus was tempted—“Turn these stones into bread; all the kingdoms of the earth I will give you if you fall down and worship me; throw yourself down because God's angels will take care of you.” Those were temptations for Jesus. I don't have any great desire to turn stones into bread or jump off of high places. But Satan has another set of temptations, just for me and just for you (you probably already know what they are). I heard a story about one pastor who loved playing golf. Monday was his day off so he was out every Monday playing golf. And he would overhear the other golfers talk about how beautiful the course was early on Sunday morning when a lot of people were sleeping in or off to church. The pastor kept thinking about this wondering how he could get off on a Sunday morning. Then, one beautiful Sunday morning, he gave in to the temptation and called up his assistant and said, “I just don't feel good this morning. You're going to have to preach for me.” Then he threw his golf clubs in the car and like a kid on the way to a candy store he headed off to the golf course. When he arrived hardly anyone was there. It was a perfect morning. Meanwhile, God and his angels were watching from heaven. The head angel

says, “You’re not going to let him get away with this are you?” God says, “Don’t worry. I’ve got it all under control.” The pastor tees up on the first hole; he swings; it’s an amazing shot--a hole-in-one! The head angel says, “God, you’ve got to do something here.” God again says, “Don’t worry.” On the second hole, the pastor does it again—a hole-in-one. And on and on for 18 holes, each one a hole-in-one! He can’t believe it. As the pastor is walking off the course in glee, the angel says, “God, what have you done?” God smiles and says, “Think about it, who’s he going to tell?”

There’s a lot of bad news about temptation, but here’s the good news. There’s a great promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13—“***And God is faithful he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.***” The Greek word for “way out” is where we get the English word “exit.” So, as I look around this room, I see the exit signs above the doors and they remind me of God’s promise. He will show you the way out. I have seen God do this for me. When I find myself tempted to say something I shouldn’t, I’ll often see an exit sign and suddenly the urge is gone. Instead, I’ll be filled with a new compassion for the other person.

Here’s some more good news. We are entering the season of Lent. Lent is the 40 days before Easter. It is meant to remind us of the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness, where he prayed and fasted and was tempted by Satan. And so, it is a time for us to pray and to fast (in other words to deny ourselves or to give up something for Lent). And it is a time to repent. Repentance means telling God we’re sorry for what we’ve done wrong and that we want to change. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, he won that battle, hands down, no problem. All Jesus needed was a word from Scripture and Satan was finished. Unfortunately, you and I, we are not always so successful when it comes to resisting temptation. There are so many times when we do what we know in our heart is wrong. Or we do wrong without even realizing it. And people get hurt. And we get hurt. And our relationship with God gets damaged. It’s terrible!

But here's what I want you to remember from today. Jesus was out in the wilderness for 40 days, right? He prayed. He fasted. He was tempted by Satan. But do you know what else Jesus was doing in the wilderness?--Jesus was preparing for a sacrifice. He was preparing for the cross. Then, after three years of ministry, Jesus went to the cross. And on the cross, Jesus died for you and for me and for everyone who gives in to temptation and crosses the boundaries God has set. Sometimes we cross those boundaries. We do the wrong thing and that's not okay. Our relationships get messed up and our lives get off track. Jesus, and the forgiveness he offers you today, is the one chance we have to get back on track. One of my favorite Bible passages is this one from 1 Timothy 2:11-13—"***The saying is trustworthy: If we have died with him (Jesus), we will also live with him; if we endure, we will reign with him ... if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.***" I just love that—"***if we are faithless, he remains FAITHFUL, for he cannot deny himself.***" We belong to Jesus. He is always faithful—no matter what.