

Sermon Draft

Text: James 1:12–18

Sermon: Tempted

The theme of the First Sunday in Lent is always trial and temptation. The Old Testament Reading (Genesis 22) illustrates trial as Abraham is called to sacrifice Isaac. The Gospel from Mark tells in brief of Jesus' temptation. The reading from James our text, refers to both trial and temptation. Temptation brings forth sin, and despite what we might think or want to think, God has no part in tempting us to sin.

Sin is our fault and cannot be blamed on God. Instead, he is the giver of every good and perfect gift. Temptation gives birth to desire, which conceives and gives birth to sin and death. God gives birth to us by the Gospel and brings us forth to be his firstfruits.

“Trials and temptations!” These words are what we as Christians at times use to describe life as we know and experience it. The words are really a cliché for our views on life.

Sometimes gatherings of Christians become, well, for lack of a better term, “pity parties,” as each shares the trials and temptations of this life. The trials may be health issues, relationships, financial problems, and on and on. Nobody wants to discuss the temptations, lest their ugly selves be exposed, but everyone has a temptation that preys on them more than others.

Is this how James comes at the subject of trials and temptations? Hardly! He comes at them not as a negative, not as something to drag us down, but just the opposite. He talks about the only answer to the trials and temptations we seem to love to dwell on. He talks about God and what he does in the midst of our trials and temptations. James reminds us that the giver of every good and perfect gift is on our side, even in trial and temptation and that makes all the difference.

Sounds hard to believe, but James begins his letter by saying, “*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness*” (vs. 2–3).

Joy? Come on! Trying to be happy and joyful in the midst of trials and illness. But that is what James is saying to us. That is what v 12 is saying too: ***“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.”***

God uses trials to strengthen our faith. Few Christians seem to get stronger during easy times. The tough times move us to flee to and cling to God. We see his hand and we experience God keeping his promises to us as he sustains us during our trials. God is the giver of every good and perfect gift, and that includes his ability to take the trials we suffer in this world and use them for our good to strengthen our faith in him and in his dear Son.

For Jesus Christ knows all about trials, from having nowhere to lay his head to arrest, trial, beatings, nailing, a crown of thorns, a spear in the side. He knows. He suffered trials beyond what we can imagine.

Yet, he always had his eyes on his heavenly Father to sustain him during the very trials God ordained him to suffer in order to save us. In perfect obedience to his Father, he suffered all, and all the while he had perfect faith in his Father and his plan for him.

In our time of trial, he is there with us, knowing exactly what we're going through and sympathizing with us. He does more than sympathize with us. He's the one who gives us a strengthened faith through it all. He's the one who'll bring us through the trials of this life and give us life everlasting. The crown of life is ours because our dear Savior suffered the trials of Calvary for you and me. So, the next time a trial comes, remember the Savior. When you wonder where God is when you're suffering, then go to the cross. He's there to give us his comfort, his understanding, his power, and his victory. Go to his Word. He will speak to you. Come to his table and receive his body and blood. You will be strengthened.

So much for trials, but what about temptations? How is that positive? Well, the temptations are not God's fault, and certainly our falling into temptation is not God's fault. We would like to blame God for all this. Isn't he the one who created us with desire in the first place? Be it sex or hunger or whatever? Well, he did, but he didn't create us to abuse the desires he gave us. That came later. Whether we like it or not, we can't blame God for temptation or for our falling into temptation. James makes it clear that we look no further than ourselves for the problem of temptation. ***“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death”*** (vs 14–15). “Each person . . . own desire!” Temptation is always around for all of us. As God told Cain, it's always “crouching at the door” (Genesis 4:7).

We struggle with it. We feel guilty when we fall into it. We make up our minds to defeat it. We can't. We won't. We fail when we trust in ourselves to overcome.

God to the rescue. He brings us good and perfect gifts. He brings us the message, the Word of truth, the Gospel. That Gospel tells us that God gave us the best, good, and perfect gift, the gift of his Son. He knows what trial is, and he knows what temptation is. Not only was he tempted by Satan as we read in the Gospel; he was tempted even more than that. His greatest temptation was to avoid the cross, not to go to that cross to save you and me, not to suffer the trials that he faced. He was tempted not to suffer and die for you and me. He overcame that temptation. He went to that cross for you and me to pay for all the times we fall into temptation. He is the only one who can defeat temptation for us.

You see, we are his children, his “firstfruits” as James calls us. We’ve been reborn by our Baptism. We belong to God. We are his special possessions. He loves us. He sent his Son to die for us. We have forgiveness for all the times we’ve fallen into temptation. We receive the crown of life in Jesus Christ. We receive heaven itself. We receive the power we need to go through this world of trials and temptations.

What is he doing about it?

He's feeding us with his Word, which sustains and reminds us. He strengthens us in his promises of his constant presence, sympathy, and understanding of what we're going through, because he's been there. His victory is ours, and, even if we fail, he will pick us up. He picks us up, forgives us, and prepares us by the power of his Word to strengthen our faith for the next time temptation comes. He does the same thing through his Supper. He is feeding us with himself, his body and blood, that suffered and was shed for each of us. He strengthens our faith, forgives our sins, and gives us the crown of life.

God knows all about trials and temptations. He sent his only Son to suffer them as we do and to give us all we need so that we can come through the trials and temptations of this world and receive the crown of life that Jesus Christ has earned for us at the cross and empty tomb.

Amen