



First Sunday in Lent

February 18, 2018 – 9:00 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

**Theme: THE GIVER OF EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT IS ON OUR SIDE,
EVEN IN—NO, *ESPECIALLY* IN—OUR “TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS”**

Sermon Text: James 1:12-18 (NIV)

¹² Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

¹³ When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

¹⁶ Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all he created.

“Have we trials and temptations?” Good question. To which we can all give the same reply: **“Yes, we do.”** In fact, the expression **“trials and temptations”** has become a cliché we use to describe life as we know and experience it in this fallen world. We don’t mind

sharing our mutual woes. But we balk at revealing the **“temptations”** we struggle with for fear that our fellow believers will discover a dark, ugly side of us that we’d prefer to keep hidden from them lest they deem our Christian character to be sorely lacking. Yet, we know that the same dark, ugly side resides in them, too. James takes a more positive approach in today’s sermon text. Instead of lamenting our **“trials”** and hiding our **“temptations,”** God’s Spirit inspired James to offer the only antidote to every test we face. He reminds us that

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And that makes a huge difference to us in this sin-filled world in which we live!

Sounds hard to believe, but James begins his letter by stating, **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance”** (1:2-3). Joy? Come on! I recall when I had the toughest trial in my life. It was June, 2006. I had what was supposed to be “routine” sinus surgery at Evergreen Surgical Center in Kirkland. Well, as many of you know, it ended up being anything but “routine.” The surgeon perforated my cribriform plate with his probe, breached the dura, and ended up causing a traumatic brain injury in the left frontal lobe of my brain. I was hospitalized for 10 days. In addition to numerous physical and mental repercussions, my faith was sorely tested in the process too. I confess that I was far from ecstatic about the whole ordeal. My loved ones weren’t thrilled either.

And yet, James tells us in the opening words of our text, **“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”** The Lord uses trials of many kinds to strengthen our trust in Him. Few Christians seem to grow stronger in faith during easy times. It’s the tough times that move us to flee to and cling to God. We see His healing hand in stressful times and we experience how God keeps His promises and sustains our faith throughout the process. James reminds us that **“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”** That includes His ability to take the trials we suffer in this world and use them for our good and further solidify our bond of faith in Him and in His beloved Son.

Jesus, knows all about **“trials.”** He once observed that **“Foxes have dens and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head”** (Luke 9:58). Jesus was an itinerant preacher; a homeless vagabond. Rejected by those He came to save, scorned and ridiculed, beaten, battered, bruised and falsely accused, He suffered and died as a totally innocent victim at the hands of His foes. We can’t even begin to fathom the trials He bore in our behalf. Yet, Jesus always looked to God the Father to sustain Him during the very trials He’d ordained for His Son to endure in order to save us from everlasting separation from Him in the **“eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”** (Matt. 25:41).

He was also well aware of **“temptations,”** for we read in Hebrews that He **“was tempted in every way”**—in every way—**“just as we are—yet he did not sin”** (4:15).

And so we sang, **“Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness, take it to the Lord in prayer.”** In our times of testing, Jesus is there with us. He knows, by personal experience, exactly what we’re going through and He sympathizes with our suffering. He sends His Holy Spirit to comfort us and give us the tenacity to persevere in our faith in Him. James assures us that **“having stood the test,”** we **“will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”** We already possess **“the crown of life”** because Jesus underwent the sufferings

and death we deserve. We're told in Hebrews, that **"for the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"** (12:2) as the Victor over sin's guilt and power and over everlasting condemnation in hell. And what was **"the joy set before him"**? The joy of giving us **"the crown of life"**!

How do we respond to God's amazing grace in Christ Jesus? As those who've been led by God's Spirit to stake our claim on Him, we first need to understand the lifecycle of temptation. With that in mind, James writes: **"When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but 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."** The critical word in this passage is ἕκαστος: **"each one."** When it comes to temptation to sin, we can't blame God, Satan, someone else or our circumstances. We can look no further than the person staring back at us in the mirror. We are to blame. And the snares of temptation surround us nonstop. As God warned Cain before he slew his brother, Abel: **"sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you"** (Gen. 4:7).

Each one of us struggles with temptation. We feel guilty when we fall into it and ashamed when a fellow Christian gently chides us for doing so in the hope of calling us to turn away from our disobedience to God and humbly return to Him. We determine that if we have enough willpower, we can defeat it on our own. But we've proven time and again that trying to overcome temptation apart from the Holy Spirit is an utterly fruitless endeavor. It just can't be done; it won't be done.

God to the rescue! He is the matchless Giver of **"every good and perfect gift"**! Above all, He gave us the gift of His Spirit, without Whom we would never, we *could* never, put our faith and hope in God. **"He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all he created."** The Spirit sparked the fire of faith within us thru the gospel—**"the word of truth."**

Paul wrote that **"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ"** (Rom. 10:17). We wield a powerful weapon when we wield **"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"** (Eph. 6:17). That's the weapon Jesus selected to defeat His archenemy, the devil, when Satan tempted Him during His forty-day fast in the wilderness immediately after His baptism in the Jordan River at the hands of John the Baptist. Our Savior parried Satan's cunning temptations with **"It is written"** (Matt. 4:4) and followed up with a quote from Deuteronomy.

Then **"Jesus said, 'Away from me, Satan!' Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him"** (Matt. 4:10-11). But Satan would return! Luke writes: **"When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time"** (4:13) when Jesus would be most vulnerable to his onslaught. They'd lock in mortal combat again on the cusp of His crucifixion.

And to the cross He trod to finish the mission He'd come to accomplish, bearing in His body the soul-crushing weight of our guilt before God, securing for all people the lock-tight assurance that their sin had been paid for and the doors of heaven stood wide open once more! **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"** He cried out confidently from the cross before **"he breathed his last"** (Luke 23:46). We are saved by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone, so **"that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all he created."** We were "born again by water and Spirit" in our baptism, and over the years the Lord has strengthened and nourished our faith in Jesus by means of His inspired Word and His Holy Supper.

When it comes to “**trials and temptations,**” we have a God who “**gets it**” because He passed through both in our behalf. So when we pass through life’s inevitable “**trials and temptations,**” we can rest assured that He will give us the courage and wisdom we need to endure whatever “**trials**” come our way and face down every one of our “**temptations**” if we call on Him in prayer and rely on His Word.

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Rely on Him to give you everything you need to get through them and remember: “**Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.**” And that, dear friends, will be the greatest gift of all! Amen.