

4th 1st Sunday of Lent - Cycle A (1999)

Genesis 2:7-9,3:1-7; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11

Why do we need this time of Lent? For one thing, we need to reflect on how easily we slip from slight sins to bigger sins. For example, the newspapers carried a story a few years ago about an Alabama man who planned to profit from a simple burglary. On the morning of the burglary he entered a house and began clearing out the valuables. He came across a .44 Magnum and accidentally shot himself in the leg. However, despite the very painful and dangerous wound he knew he could not go to the hospital. It was about this time the owner of the house returned home.

The burglar felt he had no choice but to tie her up. His original burglary offense had now become armed robbery. Now wounded, the man needed a car. So he stole the woman's: Grand theft -- auto. However, pain and loss of blood from his leg wound caused him to drive erratically. That attracted the attention of a police officer.

The burglar pulled off the road and tried to flee on foot. In desperation he shot through the windshield of the patrol car and wounded the officer: attempted murder and fleeing a police officer. However, the patrol car, still moving went into the ditch and ran over the burglar. Since he was in the ditch he was not seriously hurt by the car so he continued on foot through the woods.

It was then that his day really began to go bad. He evidently got a little too close to a moonshine still or a patch of marijuana. That is the best explanation as to why someone would have shot him with a .22 rifle three times in the butt. Now, obviously in no shape to walk, he stole another vehicle.

By the end of the day, when police finally captured the man, he had been shot four times and run over once. He faces charges for attempted murder, armed robbery, assault with a deadly weapon, two counts of grand-theft auto, and a host of lesser crimes. All of this happened because he started the day with the idea of a simple burglary.

Now this is a pretty extreme example of how giving into temptation and sinning can have a cumulative effect in our lives. That is why we need the season of Lent, every year, so that we can look at the little temptations and the small sins in our life before they become huge temptations and sins so monumental that the sin takes over our life.

Temptation and sin are like that. A little white lie often leads to another one, and then another, until lying and deceit become habits. A single act of disobedience, leads to another, and then another, until breaking the law becomes a way of life. A father loses his temper and lashes out at his son. At first he feels guilt but when it happens often enough anger and lashing out becomes such a part of life that soon father and son hate each other. Or many small sins, unrelated to each other, all add up until we feel a sense of emptiness and aimlessness in our life. We wake up one day wondering how we got to such a place of emptiness. These things, and many other things happen one step, one sin, at a time.

Temptation and sin is a part of our human existence. They will be a part of the human condition until the end of time. And as the stories of the Old Testament teach us, temptation and sin are as old as humanity itself. Pride, envy, disobedience, greed, blame are all sins that have been with us for ever. Every person who has ever walked the face of this earth has been tempted by sin. But only one man was ever able to rise above the temptation. He is the one who we came to realize was no mere man. This man was also God.

Jesus himself was not exempt from temptation. In fact, as he was preparing for his public ministry he was tempted not once, not twice, but three times. Each time he was able to resist this temptation by invoking the word of God.

*"One does not live on bread alone,
but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."*

"You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test."

*"The Lord, your God, shall you worship
and God alone shall you serve."*

As Jesus suffered his passion and death on the cross he continued to be tempted. He was tempted with kingship given the title, *"King of the Jews."* He was tempted by his own power as God, *"If you are the Son of God, come down from that cross."* But he never once gave in to that temptation, he never once in his life sinned, and because of his absolute obedience to the will of his Father, Jesus conquered once and for the final power of sin in our world. For *"through sin, death entered the world."* Death is the price we pay for our sin; death is the final power of sin. But Christ conquered sin and death by his own death and resurrection.

It is this power, the power of God's love and grace that can help us to resist temptation in this life. And that is why we need Lent? To deal with the little things in our life before they become so big they destroy us. To call on the power of God's grace, one more time, and break the patterns of sin in our life.

During this season of Lent I urge you to look seriously at the reality of sin in your life. Examine your conscience regularly and ask forgiveness, even for the little things that may seem insignificant. Make a concerted effort to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Live the sacrament of reconciliation by working at mending any broken relationships that may be a part of your life. Call on the power of God to renew you in spirit that you might once again enter the Easter season with hearts filled with the joy and peace of God's forgiveness.