

## 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost Year B

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

As I read the texts for today, I have to admit that I felt uncomfortable. Each of the texts point to how one should live their life for God. The uneasiness for me is that most of what is in the texts for today is law. The law points out our sinfulness, our brokenness. It shows us our broken relationships and wrongdoings. It keeps us in check as Christians. The law helps us to live our lives in accordance with the will of God. It reminds us to do things that God calls us to do.

When I think of the opposites in these texts for today, clean vs. unclean, doers of the word vs. hearers of the word, those who obey God's commandments and those who do not ~ the two themes that come to my mind are good vs. evil and temptation. Both themes usually go hand in hand.

Think about a time that you were tempted to do something that you knew was not a good thing. Maybe it was taking a toy from your brother or sister, or cheating on a test, or lying to avoid immediate punishment, or taking drugs, or meeting someone that you shouldn't have. We all have temptations in our lives. ...Temptations that are difficult. Temptations that can hurt our relationships depending on what choices we make. We are tempted daily by evil, by Satan to turn away from God and to turn to worldly things. We are constantly tempted to look out for number one ~ forgetting or ignoring our brothers and sisters.

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We are tempted each day to hold grudges against those who may have hurt us or have a different opinion than we do. Anger instead of grace sometimes prevails in our day to day relationships.

And of course, at one time or another we all like to stretch the rules that our parents, our schools, our employers, and our God have placed before us.

The good thing for us is that even when we are tempted by evil, God is always there ~ even if the temptation over takes us. God gives us all that we have and loves us unconditionally even if we make mistakes.

We do have the law, which may make us feel uncomfortable because it points out our sin, but we also have the Gospel; the good news of the word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

In the text from James, we are reminded of law and gospel:

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

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But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the law, the law of liberty and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act – they will be blessed in their doing.

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

On one hand, the text tells us what to do. The law challenges us to do what is right – to be doers of the word. We are called to care for orphans and widows and their distress, to supply school items for children who don't have them, to help with hurricane Katrina relief, to pray for God's guidance and for others are just tips of the iceberg of what we should do as doers of the word. The gospel is the planted word that has the power to save. The gospel, the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that as doers of the word we should share with others. The story that gives us hope.

Next time we are tempted by evil, let us try to be doers of the word and avoid the evil or wrong deed that we are being tempted to do. Maybe instead of taking a toy from your brother or sister you could wait your turn and share your toys. Instead of being part of the "in" crowd, say something about what the group is doing like, please don't make fun

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of that person for how they look, it isn't nice. Fight against temptations that put strain on your relationships with your family, such as never being home or not talking to your spouse or loved ones.

One of the best illustrations in fighting temptation comes from one of my favorite movies. In Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, Harry confronts the evil Lord Voldemort. During this confrontation, Voldemort pretends to be nice to Harry. He tempts Harry with the possibility of having eternal life if he keeps the sorcerer's stone. He also tempts him with his desires by telling Harry that if he joins him, that Harry could have whatever he wanted. Voldemort also tells Harry that "there is no good and evil, there is only power and those too weak to seek it." Harry is tempted and ponders what Voldemort says and eventually calls Voldemort a liar.

Like Harry, when Satan tempts us with opportunities that harm our relationship with God and our relationships with other we should try to step back and say no.

Temptation to do worldly things surrounds us every day. The good news for us in all aspects of our lives is that God is there in the midst of temptation and loves us for who we are.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. AMEN.