

Sermon: February 21, 2010

**"The devil inside"**

I am tempted by "the devil" everyday.

Often I have "minister's disease" ----- i.e., being tempted to think I'm more than I really am.

Often we think we are "entitled" to positions and privileges ----- just because of who we are. Well ----- life can be humbling ... because we are entitled to absolutely NOTHING.

I think of the creation story. God says to Adam and Eve (they are "us") ----- "I share the whole world with you ... the land, the animals, all the beauty you see ... just leave that one tree in the garden alone. It's my tree."  
So, what does the devil-serpent do? ----- he tells them: "God just doesn't want you to be like him. Of course, eat of the tree ... then you will know everything, just like God."

Well, they gave in. Then they looked at themselves ----- STARK-RAVING NAKED.

They see their humanity ... their selfishness ... their imperfection ... what they have done.

They are naked ... they can't hide.

The same temptation hits Jesus in the gospel for today. Finally ... at the age of 30 ... Jesus knows he has to go public. It's gonna be hard. So, he goes into the wilderness to get ready.

He is famished ... so the devil tries to get him magically to turn stones into bread.

The devil also promises ----- all you have to do is worship me ... and then I'll leave everything to you!@!!

Jesus digs in. He remembers from whence he comes. The devil is defeated!!

Hey, this isn't just Adam's and Eve's story ... it's not just Jesus' story. THIS IS OUR STORY.

It's about us ... the "devil" inside of us.

TEMPTATION HITS US IN THE FACE EVERYDAY. We are tempted to think we know it all ... that we can be all things to all people. WE are tempted to give up, when things don't go our way. We are tempted to lose faith ... when life keeps dumping on us. We're often tempted to blame others ... when we make a wrong turn.

As I get older ... I realize more and more ----- faith, hope, the church ... they are so important. Here, in this humble place, we can begin to understand and re-discover our humanity. We can be honest ----- temptation is a part of life ... it's part of who we are.

You know? ... so much in life is grounded in RESPECT. And ... honestly ... we've lost a lot of that. Friday morning I'm in our church parking lot. Over 60 cars from the high school park here ... over 200 students begin their day, walking across our property. My dad taught me a lot about respect ... without having to say the word. Actually --- he taught me lots of things. He taught me ----- when more than 10 people are together in church: TAKE AN OFFERING. I remember my mom's memorial service ... almost 25 years ago. The church is packed ... we are sad ... my dad looks at me: "We should take an offering."

Most of all ... "my daddy taught me" always to acknowledge another person's presence. When you walk by someone ---- in church, in aisle 3 of the grocery store, on a lonely street ... YOU ALWAYS NOD, SAY "HELLO" ... the bottom line: you acknowledge and affirm their humanity.

Anyway --- back to the parking lot. Two kids are walking across our lot ... they obviously don't know the "rules" ... I guess they are from the neighborhood next door. They are doing all those things ... driving an "old geezer" like me nuts.

The way they walk ----- the "cocky-it's-all-about-me" strut ... their hats pointing in the wrong direction ... their pants almost on the ground. I look at them ----- *I feel "the devil" taking over my soul!!* Then I hear my mama's voice ----- "Don, take the high road!!" So, I go up to them: "Gentleman ... have a great day!!" They look at me like I am the devil-incarnate ... don't even say "hi" ... and I feel "the devil" taking over again.

I turn around ... a dad comes screeching into the parking lot to drop off his running-late son. I ask him please to slow down and not to use our parking lot as a drop-off point. He scowls: "What the hell kind-of church is this???"

I resist the devil once again and smile: "We're just looking for a little respect."

Respect: where has it gone? ... will it come back?  
A nod ... an acknowledgement ... affirmation ... listening ... caring ... taking the time ...  
Life is about RESPECT.

Jesus was tempted ... but he never lashed back!!  
He stayed true to God's word ... true to himself ... true to his heartsong.

We live in a world where it has become ok TO BASH others. Trying to bring others down ... who are different, who have  
different views, who don't meet "our standards" ---- whatever they are.

"Bashing" has become, for some, a way of life.

Well ---- it's not ok.

It's tempting ... it may feel good for a moment ... but ----- BASHING IS NOT OK.

Interesting week ----- 3 "big funerals" ... none of them "members."

Monday ... it's Anna Marie. Her religion ... her faith ---- all over the map.

Thursday: Big Al. We used to coach together ... 'til he finally "saw the light" and found a different partner.

Catholic ... 33 years at Andrew Corporation ... only 58 ... and he "packed the place" here.

Yesterday ---- a "grandma" with no church home.

Here ... in this place ... there are no "non-members" ----- our bond is our humanity,  
nobody is a stranger.

I always see DEATH as our "rabbi" ... death is our teacher.

When we gather for a funeral ... no one is late, no one is in traffic ... we are just gathering to remember someone we love,  
and we're thinking about what's important in life and what's not.

A blueprint for life.

A blueprint for our church.

A blueprint for what we are all about.

*The blueprint is called RESPECT.*

It's "tempting" to overlook it ... but we can't.

Tomorrow I may go back out in the parking lot.

I'll hear my mom's voice: "It's all about taking the high road."

It can be dizzy "up there" ... but the "high road of respect" is always worth it.

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