

Pentecost 19B

September 30, 2018

Hymns: 422 - 424 - 445 - 192

Peace to all of you who are in Christ Jesus! Amen!

1st in 3 part series: *"Tempted in Every Way!"*

MARK 9:38-50 (esp. 42-48)

TEMPTED IN EVERY "LITTLE SIN."

Dear Sinners – Big and Small!

A little girl had been naughty, so she was sent to her room for a quiet time. Afterward, all smiles, she returned to her family, saying, "I prayed to God."

"That's good," said her mother. "Did you pray that God would help you be a good girl?"

"No," she replied. "I prayed that God would help you put up with me."

How often aren't we like that little girl? We do wrong, but rather than repenting of our sins, we pray that God will put up with us. And why not? It's our nature to sin; it's God's nature to forgive. Sometimes we have that attitude.

A prominent book a few years back asked the question: **Whatever became of sin?** It's a good question. We don't really "sin" nowadays. Instead, "mistakes were made," as our politicians remind us. And yet, when we look at some of the teachings of Jesus, we get an entirely different view of wrongdoing. Listen to these very stark words from the lips of our Lord:

"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better

for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

Pretty strong stuff. What shall we do with these teachings of our Lord? Many Christians simply ignore them. They don't fit into their ***theology of "grace."*** They're too harsh. After all, theology in our culture today is like a buffet line. You go down the line of Scripture passages and pick what you find agreeable and leave the rest behind. Is Jesus really telling us to cut off our hands and feet, and poke out our eyes? Isn't that what we have to do – since our hands, feet, and eyes lead us into sin time and again?

No, that's not what Jesus is saying. He's using an exaggeration to emphasize how the smallest single sin is worthy of hell! He knows the devil is going to tempt us to commit ***"just a tinsy winsy sin that isn't going to hurt anyone."*** Is that so? Every sin hurts our holy, righteous God Who has loved us so, and proved it by giving His Son for us to Calvary's cross. Even a little sin is a big deal when we do it in God's face. Jesus was tempted in every way as we are. He knows what it is to be tempted in every "little sin" too then!

A Gallup poll a while back indicated that 80% of Americans

believe in "God." And nearly as many believe that Jesus is God's Son. And yet, only 40% believe that religion is important in life. Now let me get this right!? We believe that there is a personal God Who created us and reigns over us. And we believe that Jesus is His very Son. (Hopefully, everyone in this room believes that Jesus is the Second Person of a Triune God.) And yet we do not take the words of Jesus seriously? We do not feel that those words apply to us? His words are not really important?! I'm not certain that's a very wise approach to life. **Jesus says to us in today's Scripture that we should take sin very seriously – every sin, every little sin!** "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off . . ." That sounds pretty serious to me. To say that sin is not serious is naïve. You and I have a beast within us. It may only reveal itself under the most dreadful of circumstances, but our old Adam, our old sinful nature, is there.

Sin is serious because sin always hurts people. That is part of why God hates sin. Sin always hurts the sinner, but sin often also hurts innocent people. A habitual drunk, who has already lost his driver's license, speeds the wrong way down a four-lane divided highway. It's dark, but his headlights are off and his blood alcohol level is more than twice the legal limit. He head ons a car and takes out its passengers. He himself survives to live with himself for many years. And another family – or two – lives out the rest of their lives with a big hole in their existence. Peoples' lives are cut short or sorely grieved, not because they had done anything wrong, but because of the sinful actions of another. Sin hurts people. All sins – even little ones. There are no victimless crimes or sins. It hurts the

sinner. It hurts innocent people, people who have done nothing whatsoever to deserve being hurt. It hurts Jesus, Who paid for each sin on Calvary.

The problem is that sins have consequences – all sins - and sometimes those consequences “seem” far out of proportion to the sins themselves. But not really. It’s just that the consequences sometimes underscore the gravity of offense against God and our neighbor. A young man goes to a party where there are drugs. His friends tease him to give drugs a try. “We didn’t give him much of anything” the friends say to family and police officers. “Then he passed out, went into convulsions. and died. We were just having a little good fun with him. But then . . .”

The lonely housewife, suffering from low self-esteem, reaches out to a man who is not her husband. No big deal. It’s only a harmless flirtation. But then . . .two families get destroyed. An employee feels his corporation doesn’t appreciate his hard work. Also, he’s having more and more trouble keeping up with the lifestyles of his neighbors. An opportunity comes to take a little extra out of an account that’s under his guardianship. Just a little. It will never be missed. But then . . .

Few of us look down the road to see where our acts may be leading us. The tempter, Satan, rarely slams us head on. He almost always begins with the tiniest transgression. Do you understand that life sometimes works that way-- particularly when it comes to harboring sin in our life? Those simple vices like greed and envy and lust and sloth and anger can very quickly get out of hand, though sins of words

and thoughts are damnable sins themselves. And sometimes the consequences of a sinful action seem far out of proportion to the original action.

There was a crash several years ago of a passenger plane in Siberia. All 75 people aboard the jet were killed. Before the crash you could hear their terrified voices on the flight recorder. Apparently the pilot was giving his child a flying lesson just before the crash. You can hear a child sitting in the captain's seat ask, "Daddy, can I turn this?" Then came the voice of the captain shouting, "Get out! Get out!" It seems his son had accidentally pushed the right pedal, sending the aircraft into an irreversible spin. It's not a big deal, is it? A pilot, a loving father, neglects his duty as an airline pilot for just a moment to show his son what he does for a living. However, it becomes a very big deal in a hurry when the child pushes something he shouldn't have pushed. Seventy-five people lose their lives. Sin hurts. Sins have consequences, sometimes what seems far out of proportion to the original act.

Christ came to save us from our sins. This is so important for us to understand. Christ did not come to condemn us **for** our sins. Christ came to save us **from** our sins. If there is something in your life, some wrongful behavior, some potentially damaging indiscretion, whatever it may be, that you know did or has the potential to hurt you or to hurt someone else, Christ wants to help you deal with that. That is the message of the cross. Christ loves you so much that He will go to any length to keep you from making a mess of your life – and your eternity. And if you have already made a mess of your life, He is waiting to forgive

you of your sins and to heal you of your hurt. That's the Gospel! That's what it's all about.

Why would Christ go to all that trouble? Why did He come down to this earth to suffer all that pain? Because sin is serious business. Even the tiniest sin has a way of getting out of hand and wreaking havoc in our lives. Sin destroys lives. Sin destroys families. Sin destroys churches and communities. Lies destroys reputations and government function. And without the cross, sin would have destroyed all humanity.

"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off . . ." Not a very cheerful subject for a sermon, but it comes from the lips of the Master. And so we should listen. Sin is serious business. Get it out of your life – every sin, every little sin. It IS a big deal! Keep it out of your life for your sake and for the sake of those around you. Let Christ help you get your life in order. Nobody loves you more than He does. Let Him give you a new beginning - today! Amen!

To Him Who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority, now and forever! Amen!