

Lent 1 – February 22, 2015
Text: James 1:12-18
Theme: "The Devil Can't Do It"

I'm not one to defend Satan, but he really does get blamed for a bunch of stuff that he has nothing to do with. Christians choose to do all manner of horrendous stuff and blame evil, of which Satan is the Father. Okay, the fact that evil exists is his fault but let's remember that he never forced us to follow him. He cannot force us to choose his path. We do that of our own free will. Abraham stood on that mountain and could have taken the easy way out.

"What? Sacrifice Isaac? Oh I'm sure God didn't mean that. His words must be understood through the cultural norms and societal mores. What God is saying is that his love for us is so great that he would sacrifice his only son for us but he certainly didn't mean for me to sacrifice Isaac. It's just a symbol, a sign, a pious suggestion. Don't be so literal!" No. Abraham took God at his literal word and in faith did as he was told. He strapped Isaac to that altar and raised the knife to sacrifice his only son just as God had instructed him to do. I am certain that Satan was active and working diligently to raise doubts in Abrahams mind but Abraham's faith conquered him.

Likewise, God gets accused of doing evil too. I can't tell you how many people were upset with God for Hurricane Katrina. How could God do such a horrible thing? People call him evil when people die or are

injured in a storm. How can a loving God do such things? People call him evil when things do not go as we had planned. How can God allow people to be homeless? How can God call a man to sacrifice his only son?

James clears it up for us. We don't have to trouble ourselves with judging God. God is the definition of right and good. If God does it or says it, it is right and it is good. None of us are equipped to judge otherwise with our limited knowledge and limited vision. Likewise, if it is contrary to God's command, no matter how right it might seem, it is evil. That's all there is to it. How can anything that feels so right be so wrong? Easy. Don't trust feelings! They are corrupted by sin! Trust God. If God allows you to be swept away in a hurricane, it is the right thing to do. And if God says sexual activity outside of marriage is wrong, I don't care how in love you are, it's wrong. It has to be by definition. It's not that I don't think you are a swell person, but when it comes to defining right and wrong, good and bad – I'm gonna go with God every time.

But here is one more thing to bear in mind. Just as God cannot do evil, so Satan cannot make you do evil. At your Baptism, God gave you the power to choose faithfulness. Satan can tempt you all day long, and he does because he knows that he can wear us down. But always remember that we are, by faith, more powerful than he. He cannot

possess us. He cannot force us. All he can do is tempt us to voluntarily leave God behind and follow him. James tells us that it is not the devil but rather our own desire that gives birth to sin. It is our weakness of faith that leads to evil desires to disobey God and that is sin.

We, like Abraham, stand on the various mountain tops of our lives and clearly hear God's command. Sometimes we don't want to listen. Sometimes there seem to be much better paths available to us. It is hard to always take the seemingly most difficult path. Imagine being Abraham, called to sacrifice your only son. We know he's not going to have to go through with it. But Abraham didn't know that!

We are no different from Abraham or James' people. Perhaps our struggles are influenced by our times, but they are very similar. God called Abraham to give up his most treasured possession, his son. What is God calling you to give up for him? Some secret sin? Money? Time? Whatever you treasure most, God says, "Give it to me." Where your treasure is...there your heart will be also.

James is calling his people to give up the worldly attitudes toward life into which they were immersed in the Roman Empire. It does matter how a Christian lives! Yes we are saved by Grace but that Grace was not cheap. It was bought at the price of God's only son. Are you living a life that is consistent with that price? God is calling James' people to rise above what is "normal." To be better than was is "average." And in so

doing to glorify him and proclaim what he has done. Are you living a life that points to Christ or are hiding your faith under a basket of worldliness so that you won't be set apart as a Christian?

Just as the Devil cannot make you do anything, God chooses not to make you do anything. You can spend your life as a lazy Christian who takes full advantage of the gifts of God and does just as little as possible to glorify him. But, if you want to be a shining star for him, he empowers you to do that. He washes you with Baptismal waters until you are shiny and new every day. He offers the food of his Word anytime you wish to receive it and he offers his body and blood for us to eat and to drink every week at this altar.

The devil can't make us do anything and God won't make us do anything. But the offer is there for us. The power has been given to do great things if we so desire. The power has been given to do works of faith that rival father Abraham.