

Lent 1
February 26, 2012
Text: James 1: 12-18
Theme: "Really?...Really Lord?"

I love those words from James,

"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him." That is our arrangement with God. We have a crown waiting for us as soon as we make it through this wilderness in which we live.

I know that sometimes it doesn't seem so much like a wilderness, but it is. We get all comfy in our recliners with our satellite TV and well stocked refrigerators and easily forget that we are still in the wilderness. On the other hand, there are days in which we are painfully aware of the brokenness in this world. I have come to understand that God allows those days to keep us mindful of the truth. We are not supposed to get too comfortable here.

On those days, it feels as though we are rats in a maze and God is capriciously shifting the walls and turning out the lights to make our lives miserable. Like one day a couple months ago, I had had a week where everything went perfectly and I felt like I was on top of the world. Then Tuesday came. I was supposed to be somewhere by 8:00 am and I was running late. I was getting up from the table

and spilled coffee in my lap. Okay – so now I have to change the suit. Then I was dashing out to the garage and found that Dudley, one of Dänya’s dogs, had decided to relieve himself on the landing outside the kitchen door and I stepped squarely into his little surprise package. He looked at me coyly from the kennel. I had yelled at him that morning and I’m pretty sure he had plotted and executed revenge. I cleaned off my shoe got in my car, now 30 minutes late, turned the key and heard click, click, click...I turned my face toward heaven and said “Really Lord?” “Really?”

But God takes no pleasure in those times when nothing is working right for us. He is not a capricious puppet master. Like any good father, he is pained when the sinfulness of this world comes to bear upon us. However, again, like a good father, he uses those situations to help us grow and learn.

A certain nameless kid went to the dentist and learned he had 3, count them, 3 cavities. They were on different sides of the mouth and would require two appointments... and two Novocain shots to fill. When asked how often he was brushing his teeth, that nameless kid said,

“Ummm, a couple of months ago.” Now his father did not take pleasure in his pain and suffering but, not surprisingly, he has been far more judicious in brushing his teeth ever since. And the father of

said kid can use the experience as a learning tool to remind that kid about the consequences of failing to brush one's teeth.

We will have trials in life, that is guaranteed because we live in a sinful world. Sometimes those trials are of our own doing, like failing to brush our teeth and sometimes others cause them for us like when someone rear-ends you on the Eisenhower. And then sometimes, the trouble is completely out of our control, like a tornado or a disease. Regardless of the cause of the trouble, we can be sure of one thing. God is always with us.

He has promised that he will walk with us through all trouble and deliver us from it when it is time. And the key is found in those last four words – “when it is time.” At the end, we will receive the crown of eternal life, but until the end, we are still learning and growing. When we are in the midst of trouble, it is hard not to look up at God and ask,

“Really Lord?...Really?” But remember that he is the perfect father and all things are there for a reason. He has all the time in the world and he will not be hurried so instead of asking “why me?” or “why now?” Ask “What?” “what” is a much more productive question. What are you teaching me Lord? What are you showing me? Or...think of this...from what are you protecting me? That day that my battery died and I was so late, there was a huge wreck on

the freeway I would have been on if things hadn't gone awry. Would I have been killed or injured? We'll never know, but I have learned to accept the little inconveniences of life as God's work in our lives and an opportunity to stop, breathe and look around for a moment.

"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him." God never tempts or teases us, but the reality of living in this imperfect world is with us always, but then so is God. He walks with us through all the trials, all the temptations, all the inconveniences and in the end, he places upon our heads a crown of life. That's the only truth that really matters.

We're crossing a swamp here folks. Now we can pretend if we like and call it Maui if we want, but that won't stop the poisonous snakes from biting us and the blazing sun from scorching us. But God is with us. He sent his son to die on the cross in our place and because of that, this swamp is just a temporary home for us. We are on our way to paradise and we are growing more faithful by the minute. We will remain steadfast under trial and once it is over, the crown of eternal life awaits us. It is ours. Bought and paid for. So don't let the hyperbole and drama of Fox News or MSNBC distract you. God is in control here.