

SERMON – THE 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT – 20 MARCH 2011  
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

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*ALMIGHTY God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; Keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Today, we pray that God will give us the strength both in our bodies and in our souls to overcome the temptations that we are faced with on a daily basis.

In the Epistle we hear Paul exhorting the Thessalonians against immorality and in the Gospel we have the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman's faith.

All this is connected somehow in the message of Lent.

First of all let's talk about prayer, especially about today's Collect. Last week was all about dealing with temptation. This week we get more specific. We cannot overcome temptation without the help of God. We are too weak, too human. We have too much propensity to sin when we are left to our own devices. It is only through God's grace that we can stay on the path that He has for us. We pray for His defense against sin, against allowing the devil to drag us down to his level.

The Epistle might have well been written today instead of nearly two thousand years ago. We don't need much imagination to see what the world of ancient Rome was like morally. There is an old saying, "There is nothing new under the sun." This is true. Paul bears down pretty well on sexual immorality but also talks about immorality in business, in commerce.

Unless you have been pulling a Rip vanWinkle act, you can see that the world is pretty well shot, morally. We have the major international and domestic corporations that are more loyal

to themselves than to the nation. We have in-your-face sexual immorality with pornography becoming one of the largest businesses in the world.

In short, what runs this world is greed.

Where the problem lies is that when we are left on our own, we want more and more. Just like Adam and Eve, we want more, more than what God gives us and what we need. We are not satisfied with God, we want more.

That is the story of original sin.

Today, we are faced with the reality of two societies. I am not talking about the two societies that exist economically although that is indicative of what I am talking about. What I am saying is that there are two societies, one Christian, one not. There is one society that lives to feed on the other, to oppress the other for their own wealth and power. That is the shadow society of the "Ultra-haves."

They do not live by any way on Christian principles. Their God is Mammon. They profit from whatever turn of event may happen. They profit at the expense of the aged and the vulnerable in our society. They are what Jesus meant when He said you cannot worship God and Mammon.

Sexual immorality is bad and is against and has been against the directions of God since time immemorial. Yet, because sex sells (and we can sell sex) the society of this world today embraces it fully, not because of the beauty of a man and a woman's relationship, not because it is a gift from God, but because someone can make money off of it.

The antithesis of all this is the Christian life; the life that is exemplified by our season of Lent. Saint Benedict wrote in his rule that we should live all year like we are supposed to during Lent.

We are supposed to, as Christians, to practice restraint in all the facets of our life. We are supposed to be temperate in all things, to practice abstinence, to live within our financial means, and to do all things for the Glory of God through Jesus Christ.

If this means that we do without, we do without. If it means that we delay the acquisition of something, we delay.

And we realize that we, as Christians, cannot do it ourselves, we have to have God; we have to have the faith that no matter what, God is there, God is in control.

The Gospel today illustrates that. Even if we are faced with insurmountable odds, we can appeal to God. Even when there is no apparent hope, we can appeal to God. Whenever we are in the position where we are rejected and despised by our position in the general society, we can appeal to God. And God will answer.

The Psalmist wrote so many years ago, ***Psalms 37:16 ( KJV )*** *A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.*

And, again, ***Psalms 84:10 ( KJV )*** *For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.*

God calls us to a higher standard than the world. If we yield to the craftiness of Satan, or as the prayer book says, the world, the flesh and the devil, we lose what God has for us for a mere bowl of pottage. We will sell our birthright, just as Esau did for a bowl of lentil soup. It tastes so good now but when it is finished there is nothing left.

That is the real crux of life's story, eternal life or nothingness.

It is our choice. God gives us free-will to make that decision; God or Mammon, eternal life or eternal death.

Amen.