

SERMON - THE 3RD SUNDAY IN LENT - 7 MARCH 2010
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

Luke 11:24-26 (KJV)

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. [25] And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. [26] Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

In Lent we are advised, admonished is a better term, to do some serious self-examination of our lives and to repent to God all those sins, the little ones as well as the big ones. We are also to advised to “take on” new and better habits of life, such as prayer, as well as to get rid of those sins.

There is a reason. There is a very good reason.

Today's Gospel illustrates very graphically what would, not can, but what would happen to us when we get rid of those sins and not replace them with the presence of God.

Jesus tells us that if we do not let God fill the void that occurs when we repent we will be far worse off than if we had not repented at all.

Hey! That doesn't get us off the hook from repenting. No way!

Let's face the fact that we are going to live a long time, not just the few years we have here on earth but a v-e-r-r-y long time. In fact it is going to be for eternity.

We get so used to thinking in the terms of mortal life; sixty, seventy, eighty years that we forget that is just basically the prelude.

And where we get to spend that eternity depends entirely on our relationship with God, depends entirely with our relationship with God, right now.

That reminds me of a sign I saw one time in front of a little church in Atlanta. It read “Where do you want to spend eternity, Smoking or Non-smoking?”

In thinking about all of this, none of us is perfect. That statement might shock some of us but it is a fact that none of us is perfect. We couldn't be perfect if we tried.

That is where we need the grace of God, the comfort, the strength of the Holy Spirit, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Like in the Gospel for today, we can get rid of one demon but if we don't fill our life with God we will find ourselves facing more and more demons. Our imperfections are part of us being human.

That is not a cop-out. That is a fact. If we were perfect, we would not need the Cross of Cavalry, we would not need to repent.

But the real world is that that we are all “miserable sinners.” We are all miserable sinners and we need to ask God's forgiveness for our own, our very own, our most very own sins.

God doesn't want excuses, either. God wants repentance. I imagine God, although I can't for sure speak for Him, I imagine God is pretty tired of hearing the same old, worn-out excuses.

Then He will forgive us.

But we have to invite Him to come and live in us. Jesus tells us John 14:23 (ESV) *“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to*

him and make our home with him.”

Again Jesus tells us, John 15:5-6 (ESV) *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. [6] If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.*

And, again, John 15:7-9 (ESV) *If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. [8] By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. [9] As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.*

God wants to be saved. God wants us to repent. God wants us to invite Him in to our lives, to live with us, to make His home in us.

Paul tell us, 1 Cor. 3:16 (ESV) *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?*

And again Paul says, 1 Cor. 6:19 (ESV) *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,*

We are not our own anyway. We were created to worship God and to have the love of God live in us. We were created to live with God forever. We were created to live with God forever, but along the way we messed it up.

We are all familiar with the parable of the Prodigal Son. In talking about repentance and returning to God let's take a look at that parable. In the story the son, having fallen as low as could have, looked into himself and realized he could no longer be considered as a son. This is what we are talking about when we say repentance. It is the realization that we have in our way, by our own fault separated ourselves from God.

And we, like the Prodigal Son, have to go back, to go back and tell God that we have

sinned and are no longer worthy to be his child.

That is repentance.

But what happened to the Prodigal will happen to us as well.

God will rush out to meet us and in His great mercy that passes all understanding, will forgive us.

Where do you want to spend eternity, Smoking or Non-smoking?

Amen.