

SERMON - SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY - 15 FEBRUARY 2009
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

Luke 8:5-7 (KJV)

A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. ⁶And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. ⁷And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.

Last Sunday we meandered into Pre Lent with the observance of Septuagesima Sunday, the approximate seventieth day before Easter Sunday.

Pre Lent is the time that is set aside for us to “decompress” from the high of Christmas and Epiphany to the reflective season of Lent. Pre Lent is the time for us to look at virtues, the virtues of temperance, courage, justice and prudence; to look at those virtues and see how we, as Christians, practice them.

Last Sunday we heard Saint Paul exhort us to keep our bodies in control like a good boxer, to practice temperance, to practice temperance in all we do. As we Anglicans are prone to say, “Everything in moderation.”

Today we tackle courage. Maybe we could also call that virtue fortitude. We hear in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians how he has had to summon up his courage, to apply fortitude in his missionary efforts to the Gentiles. He gives us this litany of events that occurred to him that would have discouraged almost anyone, but he kept on keeping on.

Why in the world would this man go through all this? What kept him going?

We have a hard time just getting to church on a Sunday morning, and getting there on time. What is the difference? What is the difference between us here this morning and Paul and his determination not to let anything get in the way of his mission.

What is it? It is called courage. It is called fortitude. It is called love. It is called a love for God that will let nothing separate us from Him, not even physical torture or shipwreck.

It is called a love as Paul himself says in **Romans 8:35 (KJV)** *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

And again he says in **Romans 8:38-39 (KJV)** *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, ³⁹Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

In other words, there is nothing in the universe that will keep us from the love of God, that will separate us from the love of God.

As we hear the words of our Lord, **John 3:16 (KJV)** *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

There is nothing in the universe that will keep us from the love of God, that will separate us from the love of God..... Except ourselves.

As we heard in today's Gospel, we can let the hardness of our hearts reject the word of God or we can be lukewarm Christians that when temptation comes our way we succumb to it and we drift off in to the world. Maybe we can let the thorns of the cares of the world distract us or the riches and pleasures of this world lead us away. In any case it is us, not God, that will separate us from His love.

It is like Albert the Alligator said in the old comic strip Pogo, "We have met the enemy

and it is us.”

It takes courage. It takes fortitude. It takes what my little old Cherokee grandmother called “grit” to be a Christian. Someone once made the remark that old age ain’t for sissies. Let me say being a Christian, especially today, ain’t for sissies.

It takes courage to stand for Christian belief. It takes courage to speak out on the issues that confront us each day, that challenge us in our lives as followers of Christ, as disciples of our Lord Jesus.

It takes courage to practice temperance in a world gone mad with instant gratification.

It takes courage to practice prudence when all around us is bound to destroy our way of life through greed and avarice.

It takes courage to practice justice when we see those that have destroyed our economy, our morality and our ecology in the name of the great god Mammon.

It takes courage just to swim upstream against the current of popular culture.

But that is exactly what we are called to do and we are called by God himself to do it.

Amen.