

SERMON - THE 9TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY - 9 AUGUST 2009
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

1 Cor. 10:13 (KJV)

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

A couple of hours away from Atlanta, toward the Alabama line, is a beautiful public garden, Callaway Gardens. Lilianne and I had driven down there to meet someone for lunch at the restaurant in the inn. After eating my lunch, I headed to their rather abundant dessert table dressed in my clericals when I was reminded by some other diner about the sin of overeating. I will always remember their face when I replied, "I can resist anything but temptation."

Isn't that true of us in so many situations, "I can resist anything but temptation."

Paul is after the Corinthians again today about their morals, warning them about, again, sexual immorality. I don't think too many of us here today have been involving ourselves in drunken orgies lately, but we do have to be careful about other things in our lives that may be just as bad in the temptation department.

Let's take money as an example. We either have too much of it or we have too little of it. If we have too much of it, we are anxious about holding on to it. If we have too little of it we are anxious about getting more of it. In either case we are having anxieties over money. It isn't the money that is the problem, it is the temptation to be anxious over it.

Being anxious over material things seems to be a basic human trait, a temptation of the flesh, to use that expression.

You know the story how Martha was also anxious about having to serve a lot of guests

while her sister just lolled around, wasting her time, listening to Jesus.

You also can remember the words of Jesus when he told her, Luke 10:41-42 (ESV)
Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, [42] but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

We get anxious ourselves and troubled about many things, our careers, our lifestyles, are we keeping up with the Jones or are the Jones about to catch up with us.

We are always tempted to be anxious, to worry about the superficial rather than to be concerned with our eternal lives.

Jesus tells us to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven.... Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and God will see that we have all that we need.

The Gospel today tells us the results of unbridled temptation, how the young man took his inheritance and went and spent it in a most immoral way. I preached a sermon here at St. John's a couple of years ago where I said the prodigal son went off to a far country and spent ninety percent of his inheritance on women and booze and just wasted the rest of it.

There was only one person in that whole congregation that day who mentioned that he had caught that statement.

Seriously, we are tempted every day to stray off the path one way or another. Paul tells us God will always have a way to escape the snare. We may not have the encounters with the temptations of the Devil that Saint Antony had in the desert where he had the actual and physical fights with him, but we have sometimes just as a hard fight to resist all the worldly distractions around us that will lead us away from God.

And we might just lose the fight sometime. We might just fall.

There is an old cartoon where there is this dragon leaning up against a tree picking his teeth with the knight's lance while there are all sorts of armor parts lying around the area. The caption reads, "No matter how smart you are, no matter how hard you try, sometimes the dragon wins."

Sometimes the dragon wins. Sometimes the dragon wins the battle but we have to remember that no matter how many battles the dragon wins, he has already lost the war.

Our task in this case is to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, ask God to forgive our fall and get back on the path. If we fall, God will forgive us if we earnestly ask his pardon and we seriously intend to resist that same temptation again.

What did Jesus say to the woman caught in the act? John 8:10-11 (KJV) *Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? [11] She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.*

And the Gospel this morning is a parable of God's forgiveness. The words that the prodigal son's father are so expressive of God's love for us, Luke 15:23-24 (KJV) *And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: [24] For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.*

God loves us. God loves us, warts and all. But he expects us to go, and like the woman who Jesus forgave, sin no more.

Amen.

