

First Sunday in Lent
February 18, 2024
What Happens When God Acts on His Desires?
James 1:12-18

“Man, sakes alive, did he or she ever stand the test of time!”

So often in life we hear about those rare individuals that really proved to be the genuine article. They really practiced what they preached... they got the job done...when times were tough, they were the tough who got going. Relatives, teachers, coaches, bosses, employees, volunteers, and community leaders that totally seemed to fit the definition of what inspired the opening of James' epistle today.

BUUUUT...there's a catch...almost immediately verse 14 betrays the reality of our human condition and the real results of our innermost desires. When we act solely on our desires the result is not what any of us truly want, nor want to experience unless we have to.

Being the one who endures to the end means first confessing who we really are...
...and when we know who we really are, then we know from whence the blessings came that gave us the strength to remain steadfast under trial. But when we ignore that truth, our desire to choose our own identity causes nothing more than death for the unrepentant sinner.

We have a lot of problems with our identity in our culture today. It's a society where some people are confused by what they really are!

Some people picked the wrong career, and it really doesn't define who they are. But they are stuck in it because of the level of financial remuneration it provides for them to live to the standard they are comfortable with. I see this a lot. Instead of being what God created them to be and living on less, they drone on in misery because the money has become their master.

I have seen people living more pitifully in dual relationships. Not satisfied with the love of only one as God designed it. They are seeking after others to make them happy and live a life that lies about their monogamy with both of their partners.

I have seen abuse carefully hidden in the confines of the home. The abuser is protected by those that are abused with everyone pretending everything is ok, because the abuser provides the income.

Wow, pastor! Harsh. But that's not me. I know it isn't. All of those things happened either in another congregation, or the Army, or outside our community of Faith.

But temptations do come to all. We should never think we are above it either, because the seeds of sin are already dwelling in us just waiting to sprout forth. Like the people that gossip about a peer the moment they walk away. (I have been guilty of that myself.) What about the people that hide private sins, people that lie when asked honest questions, or just plain pretend they can't help when they know full well they can. I think we've all been there and done that. We may think we can somehow keep it deep down where God can't see it. After all, if our friends and neighbors don't know our sinful desires, we think we have somehow kept it under wraps.

Hebrews 4:13 teaches us, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account..."

And Proverbs 5:21 adds, "For your ways are in full view of the Lord; he sees their every step."

The desire of our hearts is already inclined to rebelling against God, and He is fully aware of it. And that is just the beginning. On our own rehabilitating our sins is not unlike a doctor operating on himself when he is unconscious. You're certain to die. And, knowing that full well, leaves us open to Satan's manipulation. St. Augustine says, "There are three things which go to complete sin: (#1) the suggestion of, (#2) the taking pleasure in (#3) and consenting to." (NPNF 1 6:15)

1 John 2:16 seals Augustine's godly words of wisdom saying, "...all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world!"

What a tragedy that the Christian heart is so easily swayed to sins motivated by the desires of the heart, the siren songs of the world, and the Devil himself. We get caught up in the race, dress to impress, and titillating talk fills our Snapchat accounts. Our televisions tell the tales Lucifer wants told and our search histories have so much to be sorrowful over. We simply sell out to the world making it our master that provides nothing but spiritual pain.

1 John 2:17 continues, "And the world is passing away with all its desires."

Some say you have to see it to believe it. But if we waited to see the world's end then it's too late to believe how we could have ever been saved from being destroyed with it.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit James cries out to us today, "DO NOT BE DECEIVED MY BELOVED"

Our sinful desires, the world and Satan himself have nothing to offer us but eternal death. Like grabbing onto a boat anchor as if it were a life preserver only insures our demise by spiritual drowning. But Christ calls to you from the ship which is His church. And we look to Him no longer seeing to believe, rather we now believe to see our salvation in Him.

In Religion class we study the office of the pastor. Our opening exercise tasks us with comparing a pastor's role with that of: the head of the family, the CEO of a corporation, a teacher, a sharecropper, a counselor and finally an advertising agent. Of all the comparisons the one that catches their imagination most is that of the advertising agent and it inspires them to come up with other jobs, as well, not listed in our curriculum.

They have suggested that a pastor is like a customer service agent on the phone - a spiritual help line, if you will. They thought a pastor is like an insurance salesperson, only he sells *eternal* life insurance for free! And I realized that while they were focusing on what a pastor does, the reality is they were describing what everyone is called to do and equipped by the Holy Spirit to *do it*. Their enthusiasm was fun, not because they were interested in the topic, but because I could tell they got it. It's never about what we want, it's about what Christ wants for us, and the hope we have in Jesus.

Pastors are not the only ones called by God to do Ministry, and they are certainly not the only ones that get the spiritual gifts necessary to carry out said ministry. Everyone by faith gets the perfect gifts that come down from the Father which pushes the evil seeds of sins out of our hearts. Not just the teachers, ministers, and preachers, but also the civic leaders, the laborers and the managers, the soldiers and the sailors, the builders and the craftsmen, skilled and unskilled alike, have all been given gifts by God to manage *His* creation.

Enabled by the Holy Spirit we can do the good works the world needs and not the evil deeds that destroy it. This was the life for which we were baptized. This is why God generously redeemed us and saved us through the death Jesus died for us.

We know what happens when we act on the desires of our hearts, we all die...

But do you know *what happens when God acts on the desires of His heart?* Only His son dies. He dies so we can have life eternal in Him.

Our Gospel lesson says this perfectly for our first Sunday in Lent in verse 15. (Saturday only) Pick up your bulletin and let's read it out loud together as people who believe Jesus' death was meant for sinners like us.

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.”

Now, may that peace which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus throughout these forty days of Lent.

AMEN.

Rev. Marc A. Kappel, M.Div.
Senior Pastor
Faith Lutheran Church, Eustis, Florida