

Jesu Juva

“The One in the We, and We in the One”

Text: James 1:12-18; Mark 1:9-15 (Genesis 22:1-18)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

We heard today in the epistle from James: *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial*, - or under temptation - *for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him*. And that man is . . . not you.

You confessed that fact earlier, if you meant it when you said: *I, a poor, miserable sinner*. For when you said those words, you were saying: the trials came, the temptations came, and I was not steadfast and immovable. I caved. I sinned. I did not fear, love, and trust God above all things.

That’s also what we recognized on Ash Wednesday, when those ashes were ground into our foreheads, but more importantly when God’s Word was ground into our hearts, marking us as sinners returning to dust in death.

And it’s what you confess everyday as you say the Lord’s Prayer, when you pray: *And forgive us our trespasses*. You are saying: I ignored God’s “No Trespassing” signs again. I did not remain steadfast. I went where I should not have gone, with my hands and feet and eyes, with my tongue and mind and heart.

So that *crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him*? . . . We’ll get back to that.

First, take note of what else we pray in the Lord’s Prayer. In fact, right after we pray for forgiveness. We then say: *And lead us not into temptation*. And the Small Catechism tells us that we’re praying for God to *guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, or other great shame and vice*. . . . *That we may finally overcome them and win the victory*.

I want to think about those things for a moment, those things of satan . . .

**False belief** - because the world makes some pretty good sounding arguments sometimes, you know? That God didn’t really say that, or that was true then but not now, or how unreasonable is that . . . we know better now. It’s easy to be seduced into false belief.

**Despair** - because things in life are tough, the world is scary and seems to be falling apart, there's so much evil, and some days, you know, you just feel like giving up. It all seems pointless, nothing's getting better, the worries, the pain, the weariness . . .

**And other great shame and vice** - what are the vices in your life that you wrestle with? That you're ashamed to even voice? The Church at one point categorized them as seven deadly sins: wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony. It's hard to pick from that list, isn't it? I'm guilty of them all.

*So guard and keep us, we pray! We implore! 'Cause I'm such an easy target! Remember how when you were young (or for those of you who still are), you know just how to poke your brother or sister to get a rise out of them and get them in trouble? And how fun that is? That's how satan is with you. He knows you and he knows just where to poke, he knows just how to tempt, he knows when you're weak and vulnerable and how to take advantage of those times. So guard and keep us, dear Father in heaven.*

But there's something else in the explanation to that petition - something one of my adult confirmands pointed out to me one time. (That's one of the great things about always teaching the catechism - I'm always learning too!) She (I think it was a she) asked about that line: *that we may finally overcome them and win the victory*. She asked: why do we say that? *We*? Overcome *them*? When we just went through the fact that we can't. . . . It's a pretty good question! Seems silly to pray it . . .

Unless included in that "we" is someone who can. Unless there is someone praying these words *with us* who can . . . who could . . . and who did.

And that's what we heard in the Holy Gospel. We pray "and lead us not into temptation," but there we heard that Jesus IS led into temptation. Very purposefully and deliberately. By the Spirit who descended upon Him in His baptism. Immediately after He is baptized, the Spirit does to Jesus what we ask Him not to do to us - leads Him out into the wilderness, for the express purpose of being tempted by the devil. Now Mark doesn't give us as many details about what happened out there like Matthew and Luke do, but still he wants you to know: there is Jesus, on the front lines of the battle against satan. There Jesus is with us, for us - **there is the one in the "we" who can!**

And not only can, but did, as His resurrection from the dead on Easter proved. The one who bore our sins and trespasses on the cross and died with them - all of our false belief, despair, and other great shames and vices - overcomes them. With our sin and the curse of our sin upon Him He dies, and dying is placed in the grave. But His breaking the bonds of the grave and rising from the dead means not only are those two things overcome and defeated, but so is the sin that caused them. And the victory is won.

And so *the man who is blessed*, the man who *remained steadfast under trial and received the crown of life*, is Jesus. Just like the better-known Beatitudes from Matthew, this Beatitude from James is about Him, Jesus. He is the One. He is the man. **He is the one in the “we.”**

And so here’s the good news for you, what James wrote next about the crown of life that Jesus won: *which God has promised to those who love him*. “Those” - the many, us - who love “Him” - the One, Jesus - have the promise of the crown of life that He won for us.

Jesus overcame. Jesus won the victory. And just as He gave us the words of His prayer that we may pray it with Him and He with us, so He gives us the victory that He won that we may share it with Him. It’s a little like when a small child comes home from the store with her father and excitedly goes up to mom and says: *we bought you something! We? Right?* The father did all the buying, but is happy to include his daughter (or son!) in the “we.”

Jesus is happy to include you in the “we.” And so after He returns from His time in the wilderness being tempted, Jesus (Mark tells us): *came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; - the victory is at hand - repent and believe in the gospel.”* Which is exactly (but in a lot fewer words!) what I’ve been saying today. We repent that we don’t and can’t, and believe in the One who can and did.

*Believe in the One who can.* That’s what Abraham did. I have to say at least something about that powerful story that we heard today. I’m always amazed by it - and not just by what Abraham did, but Isaac too! We’re not told anything about him in this story, but do you think a 100+ year old Abraham could have tied up a strong young Isaac if Isaac did not allow him to? That was a test! Which puts me to shame everytime I hear it, because I know I would never - could never - do that. I cave so easily to temptations a lot less - a LOT less - than that!

Abraham believed in the One who can. Who could fulfill His promise even if the promised one was killed.

Is that an example for us? An inspiration for us? Maybe. A little. We should have such faith in the One who can. But even more and mostly, it is a picture for us of the One who *did* - of the Son, Jesus, who willingly went to His death, and the Father who did not spare His only Son, but gave Him up for us all. The promised one was killed, in our place, that in His resurrection, we too might have a new life.

And that new life is yours. Begun in baptism, sustained by the Word, and fed by His Supper, His Body and Blood. And so He who *brought you forth by the word of truth*, He

will bless you and keep you and give you that crown of life that we could never win on our own. For connected to and in the One who can and did, it is yours.

Which is not, then, a license for us to sin, since the victory is already ours. Quite to opposite, actually. For if satan wants to lead us into *false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice*, our Lord is leading us into their opposites - true belief, joy, and great and virtuous works. For you see, that's part of the victory too - doing the opposite of what satan wants us to do and rubbing his nose in his defeat! So everytime you repent, everytime you believe in the gospel, everytime you rejoice in your sufferings, everytime you do a good work, help those in need, resist temptations to sin, speak up for the low, give of yourself, pray, and all those good things our Lord would have us do? That's your victory dance! That's living your new and triumphant life - ruling the ruler of this world with the crown on you and not on him. That's you telling your Father, "We did it!" And He, smiling at Jesus, saying, "Yes, yes you did. Well done."

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.