

“OWN IT!”

Dear Friends in Christ:

This year's Lenten sermon series, introduced over the weekend, is entitled "**Lord, I'm Tempted.**" My first response upon hearing those words was "*Yes, that's me! Lord, am I tempted!*" Note that my response is not: "*Lord, why these temptations?*" Nor did I say, "*God, why are you tempting me?*" Temptation has been present in this world ever since Satan did everything possible in the Garden of Eden to create doubt in the minds of Adam and Eve; spurring dissatisfaction with their idyllic circumstances; leading them to think they were missing out on something by not being able to eat the "forbidden fruit," then blaming each other for crossing the line before finally blaming God!

Adam tries a double deflection, declaring to the Lord: "*The woman **YOU** put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it!*" The woman tries to weasel out of responsibility by blaming it on the devil, saying to the Lord: "*The servant deceived me, and I ate!*" It's been like that in human lives ever since - blaming others, pointing the finger, justifying and rationalizing bad behavior and poor choices, running and hiding from what we do and say, minimizing the consequences of sin, turning "*on*" God instead of "*to*" Him when trials, tests and temptations come our way!

You see, that's not just some "*story*" in Genesis Chapter 3 when Scripture records the fall into sin, because the daily reality

of every person's life – yours and mine - includes this battle between “*good and evil.*” It's the reality of the “*ashes*” placed on our foreheads last Wednesday, temptation no longer a game of “*ring around the rosies, pocket full of posies, ashes, ashes, we all fall down!*” And do we ever “*fall down*” – me, you, Moms, Dads, pastors, teachers, husbands, wives, children, brothers, sisters, friends, family, our idols and heroes, mentors and models, those who pretend to have it all together – we all “*fall down*” – needing to pray every day on bended knee: “*God be merciful to me, a sinner!*”

The first step, you see, in dealing with and overcoming temptation is to “**own it!**” If we want to get to the “*core*” of temptation we have to **OWN IT!** The Apostle James writes: “*Let no one say when they are tempted, “I am being tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when they are lured and enticed by their own desires.”* (James 1:13-14) Jesus gets right to the heart of the matter, when Matthew's Gospel records our Lord's teaching: “*But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.*” (Matthew 15:18-19)

And that's just the tip of the iceberg, keeping our sins general and applicable to all, because no one knows like you, like I, the temptations that are harbored deep in our hearts and yet haunt us, keeping them secret as much as possible, wondering why we are so powerless sometimes to stand up against and persevere when temptations come our way. Once we “**own it,**” then we can turn to the power of God's Word, cherishing this promise from tonight's lesson: “*Blessed are those who remain steadfast under trial, for when you have stood the test, you will receive the crown of life, which God has*

promised to those who love him.” (James 1:12) It’s when we “**own it,**” crying out in confession with the Apostle Paul: “*The good that I would, I don’t do; the bad I do not want to do is the very thing I end up doing! O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the bondage of death,*” - that we receive by God’s grace through faith the absolution: “*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” (Romans 7:13-25)

Heavy stuff, huh, which is why Jesus taught us pray:
*“Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread,
and forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And lead us not into temptation.”* (Luke 11:1-4)

Once we get past the blaming and the naming, calling ourselves out for temptation and sin and “owning it” - then we can move forward in repentance, trust and faith, as Luther explains in the Sixth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer:

God surely tempts no one to sin, but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or lead us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins; and though we are tempted by them, we pray that we may overcome and win the victory. (*Luther’s Small Catechism*)

And win we will! This is our Lenten “*March Madness*” - proclaiming victory NOW because of what Christ has already done for us! Even as we “OWN UP” to our own sin and struggle with temptation, “*we do not have,*” as the Book of Hebrews records, “*a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-yet he did not sin.*” (Hebrews 4:15) This ONE who WON is Jesus, the Son of God, living the perfect life we

couldn't; dying on Calvary's Cross the death our sin deserved; rising on Easter morn to give everlasting life to all who believe! This is the "core" teaching of our Christian faith that overcomes that rotten "core" in the Genesis Garden, the very hope expressed by the Psalmist long ago to those who trust in the Lord:

*"Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him;
I will protect him, because he knows my name.
When he calls to me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and honor him.
With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation."* (Psalm 91:14-16)

That sounds like victory to me! *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

SO now...important words...**SO, now** that we know by grace through faith the victory of Jesus Christ over sin, Satan and death, how will we fight the good fight when temptation comes our way, knocking on the door of our hearts again, seeking to lead us to be less than God intends? One approach, as recommended by Pastor Lew, is to respond to temptation by saying, thinking, remembering, feeling, and praying: *"No thanks. I'm with Him!"* Or, better yet, *"He's with me!"* Such a faith awareness, when linked with the Word of God, is a powerful Holy Spirit weapon when a *"person is tempted, lured and enticed by their own desires."*

A second approach is this: When temptations come, and they will, **"OWN IT!"** Take up the struggle head on with Jesus by your side; don't blame God or others; refuse to be a spiritual wimp, defeated by peers and pressures that can take you down the wrong paths; don't be deceived by temporary pleasures or

place yourself in situations and settings that are going to brew up a ton of trouble; and perhaps even ruin your life or destroy your marriage, reputation, relationships, character and careers! And I'm not talking just to the young people here tonight, but to all of us in every age and season of life; we all are enjoined in Scripture to *"take heed, lest we fall!"* So, let's **OWN IT!**

And the Good News is this...**even as we "own it" - we're not on our OWN!** When it comes to sin and temptation, we have to **own it...but we're not on our OWN!** *Do you get this, my friends?* By the power of the Holy Spirit, you have to *get this*, otherwise tonight's sermon is but another dump truck load of guilt, adding burden to your daily walk, tempting you to just give up and go your own way and do your own thing! You have to *get this* and believe this: **Jesus has already done for you what you cannot do on your own!** As we sang in the hymn:

*He felt the tempter's power at dark Gethsemane;
He followed to the judgment hall, bearing the cross;
He climbed Calvary's mournful mountain, the sacrifice complete;
His breathless clay was laid in the tomb; and
He is risen from the dead so that we too might live!* (LBW109)

"Lord, I'm tempted!" Yes, that me! Lord, am I tempted!" You are too. Let's **"own it"** tonight and claim by faith new life and power in Christ, knowing we're never **on our own!**

And all God's people say: **AMEN!**

