

“That All-Pervasive Snake”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – February 26, 2023

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

Do you believe in original sin? If I asked, some of you might answer quite cutely, “Yes, I believe in original sin, in fact I have always thought that if I was going to sin, I might as well be original.”

Then, of course, there are the many stories, such as the one about the church billboard that said, “If you desire to be done with sin, come on in.” As the people read more closely, they discovered that someone had written in red lipstick, “But if you are not quite sure, call 876-5309.”

What is original sin? Who is the tempter? Is it a snake? Does the devil still prowl around in this world? Where does it start? How does it get into our minds? You know, you tell your children not to go out in the street, as soon as you turn your back, they have gone into the street!

We all have temptations that we deal with on a daily basis. The question that most of us have is “how does it affect me?” Let’s also look at some vignettes to shed some light on how temptation works.

A student studies hard for the test. She spends hours studying, reading, and re-reading the unit. She makes the note cards, takes written-out sample tests, and answers them, and feels pretty good for the test. But when she enters the test, she finds questions that she had not anticipated.

ENTER THE SNAKE: “Why don’t you sneak a peek over at Kelli’s paper? Kelli always gets good grades. You have always been told not to cheat, but this is different. You really studied. You don’t deserve a bad grade. Why, just look, even the teacher does not care if you cheat. He just stepped out of the room. Go ahead, it will be O.K.”

A young man gets his first real job. It is wonderful to have money to do things that he wants to do. Besides that, he likes to meet all these people as he networks in his profession. It feels so good to finally have responsibility for himself. He is so proud of this time of his life.

ENTER THE SNAKE: “Aw, come on, you do not have to get up so early this morning. The boss said that you need to be on time every day, but it will be okay

to be late. He really didn't mean it when he said that promptness is important. After all, he was late yesterday. And one day last week Jesse was late, and Jesse has been around the company for a long time and never got fired."

We work so hard to get all our records for the tax man to do our taxes. It really does take a lot of time to get them all collected, but now that we have them all in a box and sorted, it feels pretty good.

ENTER THE SNAKE: "You know, you could just as well not take some of those records with you. After all, Uncle Sam will never know about some of the earned income you made from that side job. Why you hardly make enough now to live on, without giving a percentage of it to the government."

Last one! I have really been feeling good since the doctor finally got my insulin regulated. I really thought that it was going to be awful adjusting to being a diabetic, but it has not been so bad. My spouse has been so wonderful, too, helping me to eat right. And they have come out with some great tasting diabetic recipes that help.

ENTER THE SNAKE: "You mean that you aren't going to eat that scrumptious looking piece of pie? The doctor never told you that a piece of pie would kill you, did he? Just taste it. It is as light as a cloud. How could something that looks so good be bad for you?"

And the temptations go on. Just as the snake tempted Adam and Eve beyond the breaking point, so also temptation is here today. It may be in the form of a so-called friend. It may be your own mind. It may simply be an attractive sign or commercial, or it might even be a basic need that is clamoring to be filled. Temptations come in all sizes, shapes, and ways. For some, temptation comes when they are feeling down and just need a little "pick me up." For others, temptations are a part of celebrating something. Still others fall into the "everyone else is doing it" category. There are so many ways that temptations come, and there is no possible way of living a life that will avoid that happening. It has been that way since the beginning of time.

It reminds me of a story. Did you know that one of the largest freshwater turtles is the alligator snapping turtle. Found primarily in the southeastern United States, these massive turtles have been known to weigh close to 250 pounds. They are carnivorous, and while their diet is primarily fish, they have been known to eat almost anything else they can find in the water—even in a few cases small

alligators! The alligator snapping turtle relies on a uniquely deceitful method of foraging for fish.

The turtle will lie completely still on the floor of a lake or river with its mouth wide open. At the end of the turtle's tongue is a small, pink, worm-shaped appendage. The turtle wiggles the end of its tongue so that it looks like a worm moving through the water. When a fish comes to eat the worm, the turtle's jaws rapidly close, trapping the fish so that it cannot escape.

Similarly, to the snapping turtle's lure, temptation comes in the guise of something desirable, but it always carries destruction with it in the end. If we could see the result rather than the tempting part, it would be far easier to resist. Temptation cleverly disguises what is deadly in the guise of something pleasurable.

The sad part is that it is oftentimes so unrecognizable. If Adam and Eve had known what was going to happen, they certainly would not have tasted the apple. If the test-taker knew how much it was going to hurt seeing the test torn up and thrown away. If the young person in his first job only realized just how easy it is to be fired. If only the tax evader had known how easy it is to be caught. If only, if only, if only... And yet, if only, is a poor excuse, because, in most cases, we really do know. Yet we succumb to the temptation anyway. We know that if we drink too much, we will be drunk. We know that if we punch some else, we are liable to get punched back. We know that if we cheat, we are likely to get caught. Yet somehow, we take the bite of the apple.

I want to close with this story: A man purchased a white mouse to use as food for his pet snake. He dropped the unsuspecting mouse into the snake's glass cage, where the snake was sleeping in a bed of sawdust. The tiny mouse had a serious problem on his hands. At any moment he could be swallowed alive. Obviously, the mouse needed to come up with a brilliant plan.

What did the terrified creature do? He quickly set up work covering the snake with sawdust chips until it was completely buried. With that, the mouse apparently thought he had solved his problem.

The solution, however, came from outside. The man took pity on the silly little mouse and removed him from the cage. No matter how hard we try to cover or deny our sinful nature, it is fool's work. Sin will eventually awake from sleep and shake off its cover. Were it not for the saving grace of God's hand, sin would eat us alive. Amen.