

Children's Sermon, March 1, 2009
1st Sunday in Lent

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Marion, MA

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Kids, have you ever seen a cartoon with a little devil whispering into a person's ear on one side, and a little angel whispering into a person's ear on the other side?

What are those two little guys trying to do to the person in the middle?
(Get him to do a bad thing; Get him to do the right thing.)

Sometimes when I was a young boy, I listened to that little angel voice, and I got the idea to do something good. When I was about eight years old, I picked wild flowers in the field near my house, put them in bunches, poured some water in my little red wagon, then laid the flowers in the water. My next door neighbor and I then went from door to door in our neighborhood hoping to earn some money by selling the wild flowers.

Do you think that was a good idea?

I had another good idea when I was about nine years old. When my Mom and Dad and brothers and sister sat down by the television to watch Disney movie together, I volunteered to pop popcorn on the stove, and to bring it to them in a big bowl to share.

Was that a good idea?

Many times when I was a young boy, I listened to that little devil voice, and I got the idea to do something wrong.

I remember when I got the idea to take some coins from the bookshelf where my father put his pocket change when he came home from work.

Was that a good idea? Why not?

I remember when I thought it would be a good idea to steal some candy from a store. Was that a good idea? Why not?

I remember when I got the idea to lie to my mother and father. Was that a good idea? Why not?

So if even ministers used to feel like doing bad things when we were younger, and actually did those bad things, then probably everyone gets some ideas like that. Little kids, teenagers, and even grownups get ideas that doing something bad would be a good idea.

Jesus called that temptation. Temptation is when doing something bad seems like a really good idea. That's why he teaches us to pray, "lead us not into temptation." Repeat those words with me? "Lead us not into temptation."

I want to give you some tools to resist temptation, that is, to fight against it so that you don't do something that you know is wrong, especially when you really want to do it!

The first thing is to remember God's commandments. Repeat with me: "Remember God's commandments."

God commands us to honor our mothers and fathers. Repeat after me, "Honor your mother and your father." That means we need to obey what they tell us, and trust their guidance for us. If when we think about doing something, and we know that our mother or father would be disappointed is us, that's one way that God helps us to fight against temptation. It's like God's own voice in our ear, speaking to us: "Don't do it."

It works the other way around, too. If there is something that you think would make your parents proud of you, and that would make them glad, then that's one way that God speaks to us, saying, "Go for it!"

God gives us a whole bunch of other commandments, too. But we'll just look at one more this morning.

God commands us not to tell lies. Does God know it when we're lying, or do you think we can fool God? (You can't fool God. He knows.)

Usually we tell lies to try to hide something we did wrong from our parents. God shows us that the better way is to admit that we made a mistake, and to ask to be forgiven. That's hard to do, isn't it? We're afraid our parents might yell at us. We wonder if we might get punished. But God's own Spirit will help us to admit it when we mess up, and ask others to forgive us. We have to try to obey God's commandment, and not try to hide behind lies.

Teens, we'll finish with you. Has anyone here studied French in school? Has anyone studied Spanish? Who can tell me what the word, "to think" is, in French? (penser) In Spanish? (pensar) There is even an English word that starts with the same four letters, that means to be very thoughtful. Who can tell me what that word is? (pensive).

Next, we need to talk about the prefix, "re." Whether we talk about a return, or a rerun on television, or a re-tread tire on a car, or re-visiting our childhood home, we mean what? Going back again, or doing something over a second time.

So with our brilliant language students, let's analyze what this word is that Jesus commands: re-pent. If "re" means to go back and do it again, and if "pent" is the root word that means to think something over... then what does it mean "to repent?" (to reconsider, to think it over again.)

Jesus knows our nature. He knows how willing we are to trust our own instincts and to distrust God. Heck, even I know that much. So when he tells us to repent, he means for us to look at our lives through God's eyes, and see if we're really as good as we'd like to be. And when we realize that we all need improvements, we're to turn back to God and ask him to renew our relationship in the deepest part of our psyches, in our spirit.

So let's hear what God is telling us all and obey it, so we can be truly joyful. Let's look at our lives with God's eyes. When we see mistakes and wrong directions there, let's admit it, and ask for forgiveness. That sets us free to live in a fresh, new relationship of love and trust with God. Let's not miss that.