

## Wesley United Methodist Church

February 28, 2016

"Catching Bobcats."

I Corinthians 10:1-13

A silly story has been going around about a young man who was hitchhiking through one of our Southern states. A farmer driving an old pickup truck stopped to give him a lift. As they rode along, they got to talking about the local moonshine whiskey. The young man said he didn't drink very much. Moonshine would probably be too strong for his tastes.

"Nonsense," said the farmer. "You gotta try some." He fished around behind him and finally produced a small jug. "Here," he said, handing the jar to the lad. "Take a drink." "Oh, no thanks," said the young man. "I really don't care for any." "No, I insist," pressed the farmer. "Have some." "No, thanks, really," said the young man.

The farmer wasn't going to take no for an answer. He stopped the truck and grabbed his shotgun from the rack in back. He pointed the gun at the lad and roared, "I said, take a drink."

"Okay, okay!" said the young man. "I've changed my mind! I guess I will have some after all." The young man took a few swallows before he realized how powerful that stuff was. His throat muscles tightened, his eyes watered, and he made a choking sound. "What do you think of it?" asked the farmer. "Good, ain't it?" "Yeah," gasped the lad, "I guess so."

Then the farmer handed the young man the shotgun and grinned. "Here! Now, you hold the gun on me and make me take a drink!"

Just two weeks ago we learned about temptations and how Jesus was tempted, but he overcame them. This morning we're going to talk more about temptations. As we already know, it is a topic relevant to everyone's life. If there is anything in this world that is universal, it is the power of the tempter to lure us into sin. And usually he doesn't have to put a gun to our head.

The apostle Paul mentions only a few relevant temptations or sins in this chapter. These were the sins of the children of Israel in the Exodus. He begins with idolatry, pagan revelry, and sexual immorality. These sins are still with us. Every generation thinks its transgressions are new. They aren't. We keep making the same sad mistakes generation after generation.

Actually, the Bible is as fresh today about the many temptations humans face as it was when its various books were first written. Paul also lists a couple of temptations we might not have even thought of "testing the Lord, for example, and grumbling."

We all have our own area of weakness and we're all vulnerable. Of course, some of us are more vulnerable than others. Some of us foul up our lives pretty badly because we cannot or do not resist the tempter. All of us, though, have our weaknesses. And I mean all of us.

The fact that you and I are followers of Jesus does not exempt us from sinning. The fact that we have been baptized does not mean that our earthly desires have ceased to exist.

Notice what Paul says about those followers of Moses who perished in the desert: "Remember our history, friends, and be warned. All our ancestors were led by the providential Cloud and taken miraculously through the sea. They went through the waters, in a baptism like ours, as Moses led them from enslaving death to salvation life. They all ate and drank identical food and drink, meals provided daily by God. They drank from the Rock, God's fountain for them that stayed with them wherever they were. And the Rock was Christ. But just experiencing God's wonder and grace didn't seem to mean much--most of them were defeated by temptation during the hard times in the desert, and God was not pleased.

Wonder why God was not pleased with them? Because these were the same people who were idolaters, revelers, adulterers, testers and grumblers. We are all vulnerable, some more than others, perhaps, but we are all vulnerable, even the saintliest of us. That's why Paul's words in verse 13 are such good news: No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it.

That's good news. He will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear, and He always will provide a way out. I'm particularly glad Paul said God would help us get out.

Maybe you heard about the two boys who spotted a bobcat up a tree and decided to have some fun. One said, "I'll shinny up that tree and chase him down, and you put him in a sack." The other agreed, and the first fellow

climbed up the tree. When he reached the right limb, he started shaking and the cat came tumbling down. The other fellow grabbed him by the back of the neck and tried to put him into a sack. There was a terrible commotion. dust and fur and skin were flying in all directions. The fellow in the tree called down, "What's the matter, you need help catching one little bobcat?" "No," replied his friend, "I don't need help catching him, I need help turnin' him-a-loose."

The problem with sin is that it is easy to get in but it's a terror sometimes to get back out. But think of this promise God revealed to Paul. God will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear, and He always provides a way out. What does that say to you? Here is what it says to me. If you and I give in to temptation and find ourselves bogged down in a terrible sin, it is because we have freely chosen to be there. If we do not want to be there, all we have to do is pray as Jesus taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation," and mean it, and God will honor that request and will not allow us to get sucked under by the riptide of our own desire. If temptation is tugging us under, it is probably because we went looking for it.

We cannot excuse ourselves by saying pitifully, "I'm only human." We are all human, but we also belong to Christ, and we have His promise that He will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear but He always will provide a way out. Or, He'll always be there to help us come through it.

You see, God knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows our strong points and our weak ones. And he loves us. He will not allow the tempter to destroy us without our consent.

How about you? Are you willing to claim God's promise? Do you really want to be delivered from your sin, whatever it may be? Then it is done. I have the authority to say to you in His name, You are free. Go and sin no more.