Sermon Title: The Devil Made Me Do It *(Comedian Flip Wilson, Ed Sullivan Show, 1970)*
Text: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Matthew 4:1-11; Romans 5:12-19
By: Rev. Terry Carty
Date: 3-13-2011
Place: Kingston Springs UM
Season: First Sunday in Lent

Main Point: temptation is real and so is Christ real in putting sin behind us in our lives.

Do you remember the first time your child did something and you realized that you could not protect nor direct his or her life? As I remember, it happened for us on our daughter's 2nd birthday. It all happened on the same day in unrelated events. She had her first temper tantrum that was so uncharacteristic of the exuberant little girl. And she fell and got her first stitches under her chin.

What a day for us as parents. We had done everything right, but we couldn't protect her. Do you think God felt that way with Adam and Eve? The first temptation and they chose to disobey God.

Do you remember a time when something happened that you could not pull back? Maybe it was something that you said that did irreparable damage to a friendship – a friendship that you would do anything to have not lost. Maybe it was a secret that disappointed someone you admired.

I remember how the disappointment showed on my mother's face the day I confessed that I had been smoking cigarettes. Although I was very young, I knew her disappointment could never be overcome. I wonder if Adam and Eve felt that way about God's disappointment?

ΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩ

We have an image for this from Greek mythology: Pandora's Box. Interestingly enough, Pandora was supposed to have been the first woman on earth. Zeus ordered the God of Craftsmanship to create her and he did, out of water and earth. Fast forward, now, through lots of Greek mythology and Pandora has been given a beautiful box that she was not to open under any circumstance. Her natural curiosity got the better of her and she opened it for just a little peek. When the lid came off, the evil that was contained within escaped and spread over all the earth. She rushed to close the lid but it was too late. The whole contents except one thing had gotten out and evil had corrupted the earth.

ΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩ

I know that temptation is real – it is not a myth. Evil exists in the world whether you believe in Satan or not. However it happened, we seem to be under the spell of temptation.

In the 1970's Flip Wilson's character Geraldine Jones coined a national expression, "The Devil made me do it." Everyone laughed at the expression, but everyone knew that human's have a problem resisting evil in our daily living.

ΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩ

It has always seemed like a myth that God would punish all humanity because Eve ate that fruit. How could that have corrupted all human beings from generation to generation? I have never been satisfied with any explanation – at least until I read John Wesley's sermons about the human condition.

Mr. Wesley contended that the first people were created in the full image of God. When they fell to temptation, they did not lose the power of free will, nor the power to think and respond intelligently, nor the power to chose good. What they lost was the moral image of God – they lost the unwavering righteousness that made them the perfect caretakers of the earth.

ΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩ

Something else that has always puzzled me has been how could the life and death of Jesus restore us to eternal life? The Epistle Lesson from the book of Romans today is Paul's explanation of how God has save us.

Paul reasons that Adam and Eve's sin infected us all. God used the same problem – one person's action being able to infect all the rest – to save us. God sent Jesus Christ to infect the world with God's goodness. God's gift of grace infects us to conquer sin and death. God's gift in Christ made it possible for us to be righteous.

I love this image of infection. The power of Jesus over evil is real. I believe that Jesus has infected the world with a healing goodness. Wherever there is love, agape, God's love, there is hope. And hope brings abundant life.

Even the Greek myth said that after Pandora opened the box and its contents corrupted the world with evil, there was one thing that remained in the bottom of the box. It was Hope.

ΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩΩ

As we step into the Lenten season of 2011, take this hope with you. Just as the first human's confronted evil temptation and fell, Jesus confronted evil and stood fast. As we spend time with Jesus – reading Scripture, praying, imitating his life, taking on holy habits – we find ourselves infected with his goodness. We become infected with his Godness. God has come to redeem us to the fullness of moral image. Leave this place today fully infected and spread the germ of goodness to the world – become a contagious Christian!