



Week Three 2016 Lenten Study
Give up Enemies within for Lent
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What lies deep within you? What is noble or strong about you, or on the other hand, what may be dreadful or horrible?

Hello – I’m Randy Cross, superintendent of the Eastern Sunrise District of the Dakotas Conference, bringing you Lesson three in our study of *Give Up Something Bad for Lent* by James Moore. This week, we are challenged to give up the “enemies within” our lives. Sounds kind of sinister, doesn’t it? Like a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde situation, or keeping the Incredible Hulk buried inside of us! The truth is, we have the capacity to do good and beautiful and loving things -- as well, we also have the capacity to sin. Beyond behaving nicely, we are called to “give up” the tendency inside of us to be consumed with what we want or think we deserve, or how we react when things don’t go our own way. James Moore says “it’s what’s inside that counts.”

Luke 11 is our scripture. Jesus is eating with a Pharisee, a church leader, but he does so without first washing his hands. It was a terrible breach of etiquette, since your hands dished up the food out of a common plate. Seeing the Pharisee’s disgust, Jesus challenges him by condemning the Pharisees for “*cleaning the outside of a cup*” but leaving the inside full of filth. He says that, while the leaders make an outward sign of piety and religion, their hearts are full of greed and wickedness – it’s fake. Instead, Jesus says in so many words, let what comes from your heart be filled with love and holiness and it will all be “clean” or acceptable to God.

That’s a tough lesson -- we can act like Miss Manners, all polite and well-behaved, but if our hearts are full of thoughts that care less for others, or want the worst for them, then how can that be living as Christ lived? In Lent we are challenged to give up, give away anything that keeps us from following Jesus Christ.

So – we have three evident “enemies within.” The first enemy, the first challenge to a holy life, is ENVY. Envy comes from the Latin word *invidere*, which means to “see upon.” Frankly, it means to give someone the evil eye! To look at them with jealousy and hate, because they possess something in life that I want, and think I should have instead of them. Some believe that the leaders in Jerusalem wanted Jesus crucified not due to fear or hate – but out of envy. They envied the way the common people were attracted to Jesus. Envy is described as a chilling fire of discontent, that wishes ill on another person, because we think it’s “not fair” that they should be blessed and we aren’t. Envy works best in a victim heart – it should be me! It truly is an enemy within – and enemy of God.

The second challenge is BLAME SHIFTING. I grew up with six brothers and sisters – we learned that behavior early! It’s not my fault! I tried to stop them! I didn’t want to do this – they made me! In Genesis, the man says that the woman is the one who MADE him eat the fruit, and then the woman says it was the serpent who tricked her. It is a heart-focused self-deception. I’m late because the traffic was so bad, I didn’t get the work done because someone else kept me from doing it – or even worse, I never would have hit you, but “you made me do it,” – anyone is at fault, except poor little me. When we say it out loud, it really does sound like hogwash, doesn’t it? God has given us the holy ability to choose, but the choices we make are our responsibility. Let’s give up scapegoats, and blaming others for what truly is our own choice.

What is the third challenge before us? It is SELF-PITY. I am a victim in this world -- I have been given the bad deal, the tough life. The anthem for my pity party is “If only” -- my life is so hard, why can’t I be the center of the universe for a change? When the fact is, self-pity places us in the very center of our lives, where nothing can be seen or heard over the sound of our own self-absorbed whining. Now, I know that some of us have had hard times, or are going through difficult experiences. It’s tough in this world, but it’s then that we must trust that God loves us, is always with us, and will lead us through those deep waters, those fiery trials, those painful and struggling times! Friends, it’s not what happens to us that matters, but how we respond to God’s infinite care and love for us. When that is our core life perspective, Self-pity just has to leave our hearts. We live more hopeful because God loves us.

What “enemies” have set up camp in your heart? When we spend time in prayer and in honest self-reflection before God, we gain the power to have them leave. Let’s live intentionally as the followers of Christ, and no longer make room for these unwanted guests.

God’s blessings be upon you this week as we continue on the Lenten journey.

