

Never give in, never give up

A children's sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in St. John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts, on the First Sunday in Lent, March 1, 2009.

He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Mark 1:13

After his baptism, Jesus goes off into the wilderness of the desert to get ready for his ministry of preaching, teaching and healing. One of the things he wants to do is to test himself to see how he will be able to withstand temptation. He is tempted to make a spectacle of himself by turning stones into bread. He knows that by this he can feed the world's hungry, but he will not do it if it means giving into the power of evil.

Again he is tempted to jump off the tower of the temple and land safely. He knows that he can create a sensation and impress everyone by performing a circus stunt like that, but he will not give in to the power of evil.

A third time he goes up to a high mountain and realizes that he can take command of all the kingdoms of the world. He knows he can have that, but not at the price of giving in to the power of evil. He realizes he can do just about anything if he gives himself over to the power of evil. Jesus is confident that he will not do that. After undergoing these temptations, Jesus passes the test. He will not give into temptation.

Now all of us are tempted from time to time. We are tempted to be dishonest when we know that is wrong. We are tempted to be unfaithful to our family and friends when we know that is wrong. We are tempted to hurt people by what we say and do when we know that is wrong. There is no sin in being tempted; the sin is in giving in to it. Because Jesus does not give in to temptation, he helps us when we are tempted.

We pray in the Lord's Prayer that we will not be led into temptation. Of course, God would not lead us into doing anything wrong, but we pray that God is with us when we are tempted to do what we know is wrong. If we do give in, God helps us to get back to the right way. There are times when we try to do the right thing, when we work hard and are tired and aren't able to succeed. When we have tried and failed, we may feel like giving up. But we must never give up trying to reach our goal.

There is an ancient legend about my namesake, Robert Bruce, the King of Scotland who lived in the 14th Century. He lived in times that were very tough and he needed to be brave and strong. The English army was invading Scotland and Robert Bruce had to defend his homeland. England's army was much greater than Scotland's army. They fought battle after battle and each time Robert was not able to drive the invading army out of Scotland. Six times his army tried and six times they failed.

After the sixth battle, Scotland's army was scattered about and he fled into a cave in the woods to rest. He was very tired and ready to give up. It seemed to him that there was no use trying anymore. As he lay there, he watched a spider spinning its web. Six times the spider tried to throw its frail thread from one point to another and six times it failed. Robert Bruce watched and knew how discouraged the spider must have felt unable to attach the web across the space after six tries. He watched as the spider didn't give up and tried a seventh time and this time it succeeded in attaching the web across from one point to the other.

Robert Bruce was inspired and decided that if that spider could succeed on a seventh attempt, then he would try once more to lead his army against the invaders. He arose and called his men together and told them that even though they were very tired and discouraged, they were going back into battle once more to drive the English out of Scotland. The Scottish army fought very hard and this time the King of England accepted defeat and was glad to return home to his own country.

Last Summer I visited Edinburgh Castle in Scotland that King Robert Bruce captured. I saw the field where he fought the battle of Bannockburn and captured Stirling Castle for Scotland. Because he was inspired by a tiny spider, he learned a valuable lesson. Whenever we are faced with temptation, we must never give in. Whenever we are tired and weary from trying, we must never give up. Whenever we are tempted to do the wrong thing, we must never give in. When we try to do the right thing, we must never give up.

Never give in; never give up.