Sermon- 1st Sunday of Lent 2021

Title- “The Wile E. Devil”

Texts Mark 1:9-15, James 1:12-18, Ps. 25:1-10

Prayer

James 1:16- “Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.”

Salutation

**Bridge**

**When I was as kid, I’d get up early on Saturday morning, a great day of joy for most under the teenage years, free from responsibility until our parents got out of bed, and I’d grab a bowl of cereal, go turn on the tv, and sit on the floor and patiently wait for the test signal to go off and watch about three hours of my favorite--- cartoons. It seemed that they weren’t so serious back then. One of my favorites was this one, (insert mp3), yes, Wile E. Coyote and the Roadrunner. It’s a classic and I know I don’t have to ask if everyone here has seen it. Like our Gospel text for today, Wile E. would be out in the desert, tempting the Roadrunner to stop *just long enough* to eat just a little bit of food placed strategically on the road and then, SMACK, an Acme anvil would hit the Roadrunner and then, finally, Wile E. would feast on the long-pursued prey. It was supposed to go that way anyway. However, Wile E. just never succeeded. Time and time again, he’d tempt the Roadrunner with different traps, but he never succeeded. Ever. The fast bird always got away.**

**LAW**

**I said previously that cartoons weren’t so serious back then. In one way, I would be correct. But if you compare this one to today’s Gospel, set out in the desert with nothing to eat, being tempted by the devil to sin and suffer the consequences of it, well, then I’d say it was pretty serious. For you see, a roadrunner can travel 26 MPH. Pretty fast compared to us humans. However, a coyote, well, they can run 40 MPH. It would seem that Wile E., if not worried about all of his tricks, could overtake the Roadrunner any time he wanted. That’s pretty serious.**

**Because that is what it is like for us. I’m surprised that there were no “Halloween” versions of that cartoon, with Wile E dressed up like the devil and the Roadrunner like a sheep. It would be a serious situation; the sheep being tempted moment by moment to fail and be swallowed up by the devil. If James saw it, he would have shouted, “Do not be tempted, do not be deceived my beloved brothers!” But if indeed, the coyote is faster than a roadrunner, then the devil would feast on the sheep. I can’t even run 26 MPH!**

**James said to us, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life.” Exactly, for if one is consumed in this life, he will most certainly be in the next. This life *is* profoundly serious. The devi*l is* extremely fast. And we sheep, are very gullible. We would follow the devil over to a plate of food and then be flattened by the first trick he’d throw at us. And then be devoured. Or should I say *are* devoured. We let the devil (for it is not God that tempts us for James tells us so) tempt us and being deceived, don’t even try to flee him because of our desire and then, we fail, our desire giving birth to sin. We are, and let me name the sins, smashed by anvils, crushed by rocks, hit by trains, and stuck in flypaper. And we can’t shake it off, doing it time and time again. But remember this, it’s not all the devil’s fault; it’s ours.**

**So, how do we ever do what James asked us? We can’t. Because we ARE sheep. Sheep that will follow any trick in the book of Acme. But wait! There is another book, one playbook that the Devil can’t stand against. Let me ask you this, “Did he ever catch the Roadrunner?” Nope. The Roadrunner’s playbook just never allowed him to be caught. Never allowed him to succumb to the devil, Mr. Wile E. Coyote, in any way.**

**Gospel**

 **I know what you’re thinking. “Is he comparing the Roadrunner to Jesus?” Wellll, no. On the day of Jesus’ baptism, the Spirit led Him out into the desert to be tempted by the devil. The Holy Spirit filled Him. To be sure, the Spirit set the devil up. The Spirit knew that Satan would tempt Jesus. And this was no simple test, for sure. You try go out in the desert for forty days without food! The Spirit knew that even though Jesus was 100% man and 100% God in the flesh, that Jesus would not fall into sin, even though this *was a true test*. The devil would fail. HE would be hit by an anvil. And Jesus, would be attended to by His angels.**

 **This test in the desert was a precursor to the ultimate test and the final victory my beloved. His victory on the cross. That is, His victory over the devil once for all, over sin once for all, that we, being sheep, may follow Him in His victory. We are washed in His blood and we will be given the crown of life. That is the only way and how we can do what James asked us to do. We follow Jesus by grace, through faith, by the power of the Spirit, through the desert, holding His hand in fear if need be, and trusting Him as our Great Shepherd to lead us in a world of deception. In our dark times, and they truly are, we can rest assured in His arms, be assured in His ways and rely on His forgiveness, knowing He will always be faithful and that He will always be there for us. He is the Victor over the Devil!**

**Conclusion**

 **I’m going to keep this short, not letting anything confound what I have already said. Except I have to say this: In 1980, Wile E. Coyote caught the Roadrunner. Shocking, I know. BUT, and this is Big; running through a tube, the Roadrunner became huge, like Godzilla, and the coyote remained the same. When he caught him, because of his size, he could not eat him. Our God is always bigger than the devil. His Word is true and will always remain so. The devil is defeated and so is sin. I’ll close with this verse from our Psalm today. Ps. 25:5, “Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.” Although we are tempted every day, remain steadfast, take His hand as we wait, for we have victory in our Lord Jesus Christ. In whose name we pray. Amen.**