

**February 21, 2021; First Sunday of Lent;  
SUNDAY SERVICE & SERMON  
(50% seating capacity for COVID rules)  
Pastor Tom Olson; Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran Church  
Singers: "Fuglebergs"**

**PRELUDE:** Carol Gustafson

**CALL TO WORSHIP:** Psalm 25:1-10

**HYMN #607 "Be Thou My Vision" 9 am: One Voice Hymnal #190**

**OPENING PRAYER:** *Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. We confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen*

**CHILDREN'S MESSAGE: Taking a Test—**

**OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: Genesis 22:1-18**

*Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 2 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." 3 Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you." 6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, 7 Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" 8 Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. 9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." 13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." 15 The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time 16 and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, 18 and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."*

**GOSPEL LESSON: Mark 1:9-15** *At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." 12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, 13 and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. 14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

**PASTOR: Here ends the reading of God's Word.**

**CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!**

**CONFESSION OF FAITH:** I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen

**GLORIA PATRI:** *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is not, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

#### **ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER FOR OFFERING**

**PRAISE SONGS: Carol and Fuglebergs**

**SERMON TITLE: "THE VALUE OF A TEST"  
James 1:12-18; Pastor Tom Olson; February 21, 2021**

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

**BIRTHDAYS:** For those of you who were able to come to OK Bible study this past Thursday, we celebrated some birthdays. It was Joel Carrizales' birthday, but the cake was for Dave Fisher who is chalking up another year of learning the wisdom of God. But we also celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the largest member of our family...Russell the steam engine! On February 18, 1921 Russell rolled out of the factory in Massillon, Ohio. The boiler was filled with water and the first fire was lit in the firebox. When they got 125 pounds of steam pressure the engine was tested...belted up to a machine that made it work real hard at 275 RPM. After the engine was proven to be safe and sound an inspector by the name of S.J. Webb signed it off as ready to be put to work. For the next decades it provided belt power for harvesting grain and sawing lumber in Indiana and Kentucky.

**CHECKUP:** Once again, 100 years later I am rebuilding the engine with new pipes and valves that meet the strict safety codes of Wisconsin and Minnesota. The inspector has gone over it once last fall. He sent me a note that he will be back in April and May to go over it two more times...tested with high pressure water and then running under high pressure steam. If the engine passes the test a new signature will be signed 100 years later with the name of Dean Yourchuck, Jr. and once again the engine will be allowed to run in public and go back to work. But it must pass the tests first. **WITHOUT THESE TESTS** this old machinery would be unsafe and many people could be hurt or killed as a result. I even had to go to St. Paul to the department of labor and industry to get tested to see if I was competent to run the engine and when I passed the test they issued me an operator's license.

TESTING: Our texts today are about the value of testing. The Old Testament lesson is about Abraham being tested by God to see if he was willing to sacrifice his son on an altar. In the gospel lesson we read about Jesus being tempted by Satan in the wilderness before Jesus started his public ministry. James applies the theme of testing to our lives. Some of you listening today are going through a serious time of testing. Let's look at James 1:12-18 under the theme "THE VALUE OF TESTING."

## I. THE REALITY OF TESTING

***James 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.***

ALL: The clear assumption of this verse is that all God's people are tested in this life. The Bible says we are tested in order to see if we are ready for important assignments in this life. According to verse 12, we are tested for eternal purposes as well. What we do in this life has some sort of impact concerning a crown of life we will one day receive in the age to come. Testing is very important.

***1 Peter 4:12,13&19 "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."***

OMNISCIENT: God doesn't need to test us to know where we are at. God is all knowing. He knows us intimately. God knows us better than we know ourselves. The Word of God can even judge "***the thoughts and intentions of the heart.***" Hebrews 4:12

ABRAHAM: Abraham was a man that God had chosen to be the father of a great nation. He would be the earthly ancestor of the Messiah, who would be God's in flesh, the perfect Lamb, dying on the cross to atone for the sins of the world. But Abraham needed to be tested. God asked him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, the miracle child of his old age on an altar on Mt. Moriah. Abraham was willing but God stopped him from doing it and provided a ram, caught in a bush by the horns, instead. Isaac had a substitute.

MORIAH: But that test was more than a test. It was a rehearsal or a "type," a living prophecy. Isaac was offered on Mt. Moriah. But that mountain has other names like Mt. Zion, Mt. Calvary and Jerusalem. It was the same place where one day God would offer his Son who would shed his holy and precious blood to redeem us. Many times, our testing is tied in with God's purposes many generations from now. How well we do in that test has long term consequences.

## II. THE MEANING OF TESTING (vs TEMPTING)

***James 1:13-15 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. 16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.***

An old comedian used to always excuse his sins by saying, "The devil made me do it." However, neither the devil or God force us to do anything. We have the ability to choose. God TESTS, the devil TEMPS, we choose how to respond. If we have been filling our hearts with the Word of God, we will be strong and we won't choose to sin. But if we fill our hearts with worldly philosophy and stir up unhealthy desires, we will fail the

test and choose the temptation. What we allow into our ears and minds and eyes is of utmost importance. There is no power stronger against the temptations of the devil than meditating on Scripture. The Name of Jesus spoken out loud is also extremely powerful. When God spoke His Word, the Universe was created. When we speak the Word of God, miracles happen and Satan flees. It is vitally important that we cultivate proper desires and curb improper ones. I was visiting with a young man this week who was wondering if fasting helped. My response is “Absolutely.” Fasting and prayer are what Jesus said gives us the power to overcome demonic attacks.

***Matthew 17:21 However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”***

ILLUSTRATION: There is a parallel between the care of our body and the care of our souls. We all are aware that good food, fresh air and exercise keep our body strong and help us prevent diseases in our bodies. The souls is the same way...the food our soul eats and the spiritual disciplines our souls practices, determine how strong our soul it against temptation and in the midst of trials. Some people with very weak bodies can have very strong souls. Some people with strong bodies can be very weak when it comes to temptation and spiritual testing.

DOGS: You have undoubtedly heard about the man who took bets on dog fights. He always won the bets. The reason is that he would not feed the dog that he wanted to lose the fight. It looked the same but was weak for lack of food. That is why it is of utmost importance for us to keep church going so that people can be under the preaching and teaching of God’s Word and in fellowship with Christians who care about their souls. A well fed soul wins the fight with evil.

DEVOTIONS: Church fellowship is important but we can’t emphasize enough how important personal time in God’s Word and prayer is as well on a daily basis. ***Ephesians 6:10&11 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes***

### III. THE GOAL OF TESTING

***James 1:17-18 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.***

GOOD GIFTS: One goal of testing is to give us good gifts. When I passed my test to become an airplane pilot I got the gift of flying and the wonderful experiences that led to for me. When you pass your final exams for high school or college you get a degree. When Rebekah graduated from Northwestern she got a teaching license and now can teach school. When we pass the Lord’s tests, He can entrust us with important duties like teaching a Sunday school class, discipling new believers, serving in leadership positions and being his witnesses to the world. The end result of testing is intended to be good gifts.

NEW BIRTH: Another thing that testing does is it reveals to us if we have been spiritually born again. It says here that we get that birth through “the Word of truth.” When I grew up there was a very strong tradition of going to Sunday school and confirmation and then joining the church as confirmed members. But that doesn’t mean that you are spiritually alive. That is only proven by testing. Since everyone was expected to go to church during confirmation, we all did. But when confirmation was over you really found out who knew and loved the Lord because they no longer had to go to church or youth Bible study. It was voluntary after that and that was the test. Do I want to worship God and know his Word of was that just my parent’s idea? It was a test

of freedom and most people I knew didn't pass that test. 2 Corinthians 13:5 is an interesting verse about this value of testing for the faith. *“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?”* One doesn't want to become morbidly introspective but it is good to occasionally ask one's self if indeed we do have the Holy Spirit and the new life.

**FIRSTFRUITS:** Finally this testing makes us into “firstfruits.” This is the best apple off the tree, or the best grain from the field. The word carries the idea of best. Abel gave his best Lamb to God and Cain just gave the Lord some of his vegetables rather than the firstfruits. Cain's offering was rejected. An old song says, “Give of your best to the Master, give of the strength of your youth...” God gave His best when Jesus died for us on the cross. What can we give God in appreciation for the great gift of salvation through Christ?

**LOWRY:** Christian comedian Mark Lowry tells about a test he went through. He got a house boat and parked it in a slip at the end of a big lake in Texas. One night he was sleeping on the boat and a tornado ripped through their. His boat was violently tossing and turning on the water. The lightening flashed and the wind howled. He looked out and the boat in the next slip was overturned. The next day he was talking to the boat owners and said to them it was actually kind of exciting. He felt he would have enjoyed the excitement if he had known he was going to live through it.

It is the same for our lives. We would even enjoy the hard times and look for the hand of God if we just could lay ahold of the fact that we are going to live through it. Fear takes away our ability to enjoy the abundant life all around us. One public radio they had a program urging people to start wearing two or more masks at a time. I personally would rather forget about the fear of a disease that had a death rate no different than the average winter flu season and start breathing the fresh air. I don't criticize people with health issues who want to be careful but as for me, I want to breath as much fresh air as possible and be more worried about not living that I am about dying.

When I came to know Jesus my fear of dying left me. It is wonderful to be able to fully live because you have no fear of death. That is what Jesus did for me and wants to do for you. Amen.

Now may the peace of God that surpasses all human comprehension guard your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen

**HYMN #589 “Though Troubles Assail Us and Dangers Affright” 9 am: No song.**

**PRAYER & LORD'S PRAYER:** *Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen*

**BENEDICTION:** The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and grant you peace. Amen

**CLOSING SONG:** (Chosen by Carol)  
**9 am Recorded “Doxology” #32**

**POSTLUDE:** Carol Gustafson

**OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: 2 Kings 2:1-12** *When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. 2 Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; the LORD has sent me to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. 3 The company of the prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and asked, "Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?" "Yes, I know," Elisha replied, "but do not speak of it."*

*4 Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here, Elisha; the LORD has sent me to Jericho." And he replied, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So they went to Jericho. 5 The company of the prophets at Jericho went up to Elisha and asked him, "Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?" "Yes, I know," he replied, "but do not speak of it." 6 Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." And he replied, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So the two of them walked on. 7 Fifty men of the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. 8 Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground.*

*9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?"*

*"Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied. 10 "You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours-otherwise not." 11 As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. 12 Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them apart.*

**EPISTLE LESSON: 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:6** *Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. 13 We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. 14 But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. 15 Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. 16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 4:1 Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

**READER: Here ends the reading of God's Word.**

**CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!**