

September 24, 2006
Year B, Proper 20
St. Michael Lutheran Church
Rev. John Wertz, Jr.
James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a

I remember watching reruns of Star Trek

- with my mother when I was young

- she loved the old show and I learned to enjoy it as well

- And when the newer versions of the show appeared

- I began watching them too

- and on one of the shows

- the bad guys

- were fond of saying

- “Resistance is futile.”

- These bad guys

- wanted you to know that there was nothing you could do

- to resist their power.

- They wanted you to believe

- that the outcome was already decided

- and so you should just give up,

- give in

- and let them win.

- Now since this was a television show

- by the end of the hour

- the heroes proved that resistance wasn't futile
 - and through intelligence and technology
 - they destroyed the bad guys
 - and saved the universe - -
- Now, you and I know
 - that in the real world
 - there are all sorts of bad guys
 - and sinfulness
 - running around in the world
 - you need only look briefly at the headlines
 - from this week
 - a Coup in Thailand
 - Killings in Iraq
 - A baby taken from her mother
 - you need only look at those headlines
 - to know
 - that sin is a part of the world we live in
- And I wonder
 - if sometimes
 - we look at all those headlines
 - if we look at the pain and need around the globe
 - if we look at the scale of the problems before us
 - or we look at the conflicts in our own lives

- and we find ourselves thinking
 - resistance is futile - - -

 - and that's why we need to hear
 - these words from James today
 - James talks about the lack of wisdom in the world
 - James talks about the conflicts and disputes that arise between people
 - James talks about envy and selfish ambition
 - and even though he was writing
 - something like 1800 years ago
 - James seems to have a pretty good handle
 - on the pressures and problems
 - that face us as Christians - -
 - no matter what century we live in
 - And just as James is able to identify
 - the problems that face us today
 - I think James also helps us to know
 - that resistance isn't futile
 - rather resistance is the only way
 - that we can deal with the problem of sin on a daily basis
- James' advice to us
- in the midst of a difficult and uncertain world
 - is to Submit,

- Resist,
 - and Draw Near
- Submit yourselves to God
 - allow God's teachings to mold and shape your life of faith
 - let God's teachings guide your decisions,
 - let Christ's example mold your actions,
 - let God's love inspire you
 - to use a language of faith
 - when you speak to those around you
- Practice God habits in your daily life
 - pray, read scripture, spend time with fellow Christians, worship and serve others - -
- No one expects you to be perfect
 - but try as best you can
 - to follow God's teachings
 - Christ's example
 - and the Spirit's guiding
- Submit your selves to God and -
 - Resist the devil- -
 - let's face it
 - Paul said it best
 - We "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (*Romans 3:23*)
 - but that doesn't mean that we have to give in to sin
- Resistance isn't futile

- the more we fight against the sin in our lives,
 - the more we try to live faithful lives,
 - the more we remove ourselves
 - from situations where sinfulness can easily occur - -
 - the more
 - as James says
 - the devil “will flee from you.” (*James 4:7*)
- For me, it’s sort of like my new eating style
 - one of the ways I changed what I was eating
 - was to stop buying the stuff that wasn’t particularly healthy.
 - I mean it’s really hard to eat a pint of Ben and Jerry’s
 - Peanut Butter and Chocolate Ice Cream
 - at 10 o’clock at night - -
 - if it’s not in the refrigerator
 - that’s not to say I didn’t think about eating the ice cream
 - but it wasn’t there
 - so I didn’t do it
- Now clearly, I don’t want to equate ice cream with sin
 - but temptations are all around us
 - and what James is saying
 - is don’t put yourself in those situations where sin is most likely to occur
 - and try not to give in to those things that you know
 - run counter to who God calls you to be

- nobody's perfect
 - we all sin
 - but just because sin happens
 - doesn't mean we give up
 - and stop following Jesus
- so Submit to God
 - Resist the Devil
 - and Draw near to God
- Not only
 - do we follow God's will
 - and resist the forces of evil, the devil and all his empty promise
 - but James also calls us to draw near to God
 - to try and grow in our relationship with God
 - to seek a deeper understanding
 - of who God's calls us to be
 - to make our faith the center of our lives
- Drawing near to God
 - means realizing that faithfulness
 - is a life, long active process
 - it's not like some magical moment which occurs
 - and makes you a fully formed, perfect Christian
- No, we spend our whole lives
 - experiencing God's love

- hearing and responding to God's Word
 - and growing in our relationship with God.
- My sense of God's presence with me is different now
 - than it was 10 years ago
 - and I fully expect that
 - ten years from now
 - it will have changed again.
- Drawing near to God
 - means being intentional about your relationship with God
 - and being open to the discoveries about God and ourselves
 - that come when God's unconditional love and forgiveness
 - touch our lives.
- Submit,
 - Resist,
 - Draw near
- it was good advice
 - for the uncertain world
 - that James lived in
 - and it is good advice for us
 - as we face the confusing and uncertain world of today
- for while the
 - headlines and the bad guys
 - may make it seem like

- resisting the problems and conflicts of the world may be futile
- the good news for you and for me
 - is that not only is resistance not futile
 - in fact,
 - God has already won the final victory
 - and we,
 - as God's people
 - can lead whole, healthy lives in the midst of our imperfect world
 - by submitting to God's guidance
 - by resisting the temptations of the devil
 - and by actively drawing near to the free gifts of God's
 - love, mercy and forgiveness
 - that comes to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.