**Herding Cats (3-5-17)**

**First Sunday in Lent**

Genesis 2:15-17; 3: 1-7 Romans 5: 12-19 Matthew 4:1-11

**Responsive Reading**: Psalm 32

**Summary:** Isn’t It Odd that We Should Call It Lent When It Is Really Given Outright?

My sermon today is inspired by a dispute I have with a friend who is offended by the idea of sacrifice being so central to the Christian faith. But, to take a little aside for my punning summary, some of you may wonder about the word “lent.” You might think it has some deep spiritual roots or, at least, refers to the number forty. No, the word comes from a Middle English word, *lente:* springtime. In Old English, the word was, *lencten*; a word like, *lenzin:* spring in Old High German. The original word was neither lent nor given.

Seriously, though, the idea that we need sacrifice **is** lowering to our ego. Who can live in comfortable friendship with the living God, the holy One? The only relevant answer would be those whose characters match that of their eternal roommate. This, however is a dead loss for all of us. We left the design in which we were created for the more prideful option of seeking independence: to be worthy mates of God on our own. The end result, in Genesis, is two naked people and a collection of rotting apple cores.

So, somehow, I have to restore God’s image and no matter what I do with fig leaves and cider, the effect falls short. Sadly, there is nothing I can do to restore myself. King Saul discovered this.

The first king of Israel made many mistakes, often fearing or jealous of the opinions of the masses more than he respected God. One of his worst sins came when he took over Samuel’s priestly duties when the prophet was late and a battle was pending. He discovered, too late, that God prizes obedience over sacrifice! God abandoned him because he abandoned God.

We now know that only the sacrifice God makes, Jesus’ life, can restore us. No salve to our ego there! This is nothing we do; it is another gift! And not only does Jesus’ grace justify, but His gift of Holy Spirit adds more holy gifts so that we may become like Him. God, our Father, the Son, and the church all share the same holy spirit: a holy family.

Sin has always been about independence, separation from God. Satan always says, “Me first!” This is why all his temptations for Jesus had that element of ego and why Salvation history has always been like trying to herd cats. Jesus knew as soon as anyone focuses on “I,” they will forget that their “I” can only come from God.

“Worship the Lord our God, and serve only Him.” We are made in that divine image. As we come to Lent, give up everything else and hold to that alone!