

Sermon for Lent 1
Mark 1:9-15

Grace, peace, and mercy from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The gospel for the first Sunday in Lent is always the account of the Temptation of our Lord. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record this event in Jesus' life happening right after His baptism. This year we have Mark's account who gives us the most brief account, just two verses, yet they are so rich.

Mark gets right into the action wasting no time. Mark is direct. Jesus' still dripping wet from His baptism, the heaven being torn apart still vivid in His mind, God the Father's Word still ringing in Jesus' ears, "You are My Beloved Son, with You I am well Pleased," "**Immediately**" Jesus is driven into the wilderness to be tempted by the same Spirit that descended upon Him.

Is it the same for us who are baptized, trying to live by faith? It seems that temptations and testing confront us around every corner. Like Jesus as soon as we come out of the water we find ourselves right in the wilderness.

Jesus went there, God's anointed One. The promised Savior for you and I and our neighbors, God the Father's only beloved begotten Son before all the worlds is driven into the wilderness. This Spirit drives Jesus into the dark and foreboding wilderness, drives Jesus to the lonely place where no Human being would dare to live. A place with no food and no drink. A place that is wild and dangerous. A place in which many Christians through out the centuries have described their wilderness experiences as a place where they feel far from the presence of God. So this not going to be a walk in the park for Jesus.

Even as Children of God we have found our selves in the same place, even if you are surrounded by crowds, buildings, and traffic. Many have shared, "Pastor, I just haven't felt God's presence lately. My Faith seems dry with no spark. I have heard this, and many times from folks who have gone through an exciting faith walk, especially new comers to the faith find them selves in the wilderness. Yes the the target is their backs for Satan. We too having come out the waters of Baptism have that target too. I

In the Bible the wilderness is not only where the people of God are exposed to danger, it is a place of testing. Are the Israelite going to remain steadfastly faithful and trust in God's care even in the wilderness, even when things don't look so good? In our Gospel this morning, the Jesus the Son of God will go through this ordeal.

Then Mark tells us Jesus was with the beasts. The wilderness may not have people living there, it is certainly the place where the wild beast roam and live. The lion and the adder. The young lion and the serpent. This is their turf. And you go there at your own risk. But Jesus Goes being obedient to the God's will.

For us who have been baptized it is no different. Peter in chapter 5 of his first letter warns Jesus' followers, "Be sober minded, be watchful. Your adversary, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Resist Him, firm in your faith." In our faith life we do live in the wilderness of this world and the danger lurks with all kinds of messages from the beasts that harms us, it seems the beast attack us to cause doubt and hopelessness. And that is what Jesus went through.

Which leads us to the third point. Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days being tempted by the Satan. Well somebody had to go through it and get through it in the right way. Adam and Eve blew it. The

Children of Israel blow it. So a representative of the human race had to face down Satan and win. Where all others including me and you have blown it, Jesus, God's son, His anointed One withstands every temptation by Satan and is able to carry on to complete His mission. He does it in our place staying faithful as we fail.

In those wilderness times that Satan loves to come after us the most. It is not usually the big stuff He tempts us with. It is the little things. CS Lewis in "Screw-tape letters" writes about a senior devil, called Screw-tape, training a junior devil on how to best tempt the Christian and destroy their faith. Screw-tape makes the point that anything that draws the Christians from God will work. It does not have to be the big sins, but the little sins will work. Anything to get them question God's care and protection for them. To get them doubt. The small sins have a cumulative effect to edge them away little by little. The safest way to Hell is the gradual – gentle slope, soft under foot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.

Jesus went through this wilderness time tempted for the entire 40 days as Mark describes it. Then Mark adds a fourth point. ""And the angels ministered to Him." Jesus was not alone he had the angels with Him. Ministering to Him. To encourage? To Sustain? To Him on?

Make no mistake this time in the wilderness testing and temptation is just the warm-up for the cross. Jesus remained steadfast in the wilderness, His faithfulness would continue in the agony of Gethsemane, and on the Cross where He is crucified where He is paying the price for our sins and unfaithfulness and blunders that bring us death. That is what He takes to the cross for you and me. It there at the cross that He defeats Satan, and wins forgiveness, righteousness, resurrection. And life everlasting. He is our divine champion who has come to fight as Martin Luther puts in His great Hymn, A Mighty Fortress is Our God.:

In the Wilderness of this world as Baptized children of God we do have Satan to contend with, And it can get pretty lonely and hostile, and very often many of us feel like there is nothing in our culture that supports our faith and reinforces it. It seems that the wild beasts are doing everything to rip the faith we have to shreds. To make us feel isolated, alone and out of place. If it is so, I would encourage you all to pray Martin Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers which I have provided for you this morning. Each one ends with the "Let Your Holy Angel be with me, that the evil foe have no power over me. Amen"

Yes and not only the angels we have protecting us We have one another. The Church is the great caravan and great company of travelers walking together along the way. Caring for one another, supporting one another, encouraging one another. And part of this walk together is to help each other stick close to Jesus. The devil cannot touch us with Jesus at our side. Christ supplies us with all that we need. He fortifies us with His Word and with His Own Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. These give us nourishment for the walk.

Jesus is the man who provides this, and He is the one we all need to make it through the wilderness of this world.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.