

Mark 1:9-15
St. Marks's – February 18, 2024
First Sunday in Lent
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Tempted by Satan

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In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Tempted by Satan

Three distinct things happen in this first Sunday gospel reading in the season of Lent. Three really important things.

First, Jesus is baptized by his cousin John (who we know as John the Baptist) and claimed by God as His beloved Son. Our reading ends as we learn that John the Baptist has been arrested and Jesus proclaims,

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Between these two revelations about world changing events we read that the Holy Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness for 40 days. Jesus is tempted and taunted by Satan.

This pronouncement of Jesus being challenged, tempted, cajoled, and taunted for an extended period of time speaks loudly to us.

It speaks loudly as we enter this season of our own reflection about the taunts and temptations that face each of us. Especially during this season of self-examination; this time of growing closer to God.

We hear The Father, as a voice from within a cloud, claim Jesus as His beloved Son and immediately after it is the Holy Spirit who drives Jesus into the wilderness. As Jesus is tempted and taunted by Satan wild beasts are present and angels are there too.

There's no time to waste it seems between the glorious occurrence of God declaring Jesus to be His beloved Son, His Son in whom he is well pleased, and then being cast into the wilderness for Satan to do his worst. To try to steal Jesus away from his loving Father.

Jesus and his cousin, John, are afforded no time to relish in the baptism. No time to rejoice in God's favor and that favor is present even and maybe especially as Jesus is tested.

The Father claims Jesus and the Holy Spirit sends him to the desert sends him to be tested by Satan. Jesus does battle with Satan. Jesus faces hardship.

And here we have it. The meaning of this gospel message in our lives today. This testing of Jesus is the precursor to our lives as Christians. The fact that we too will be tested many times and the reminder that we are children of God. Cherished and beloved even and maybe especially when we are being tested.

Jesus' very human experience of meeting temptation is one more example of Jesus embracing life as a fully human being and like other experiences he has while living the fully human experience his testing is extreme.

In scripture we hear Jesus saying,

“if any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24)

Our cross, our temptations and testing, our battle with Satan comes in many forms. Those temptations often turn into invitations to Satan. Invitations to enter our lives. We don't always recognize that we encourage these temptations, but we do.

Satan is always looking for a way to gain power and he does it by gaining power in and over us.

He is always looking for a crack in our resolve to follow Christ and when he finds one, no matter how small, he makes the most of it. He makes the most of it to his own advantage and to our detriment.

Excessive consumption of alcohol, sexual indiscretions and unhealthy desires, slovenly lifestyles, and disregard of those around us are a few of the invitations to Satan in which he delights, but there are far more seemingly harmless cracks that form in our character.

When we are honest with ourselves most of us are able to identify our own invitations to Satan. Our sinful selves are all too easily encouraged and used against us.

When we laugh at something that demeans others instead of coming to their defense or at least remaining somber when others laugh, we delight Satan. But even still, when we are tested God loves us. When we struggle with those tests, when we fail and try again, God loves us. It is in the testing and the failures that we gain strength.

It is in the struggle and the repentance that we grow closer to God. Through it all God loves us. We are His cherished and beloved children.

Jesus went from the glory of God's acceptance and love to the darkness of Satan's challenge. Immediately. Our lives are equally sporadic.

Challenges to our Christianity and our confidence in Jesus are harshly confronted by illness and countless hardships. God's acceptance and love never leave us.

Our struggles are many and our failures come easy. When we speak harshly about someone to others instead of taking our frustration to God in prayer or speaking honestly with love to the person we find to be so difficult or when we turn away from another person who clearly needs our help we invite Satan into our lives.

When social or even family events become more important than worshipping God the crack that Satan will use gets larger.

Jesus made no invitations to Satan, but was tested all the same and Jesus won the battle over and over again. Jesus won those battles with God's help. The same help that each of us are able to draw on. The same help that each of us must have if we are to live in Heaven for all eternity.

Jesus, The Father, and The Holy Spirit, our three-in-one God is with us always, offering that help. We might not always remember or recognize it, but whether we do or don't it's still true. The Trinity is with us always.

I pray that when I feel Satan working on me, leading my mind down negative paths, encouraging the worst in me that I will always remember to call on God and his angels to protect and save me from evil and the Hell that it brings.

I pray that when you feel Satan working on you, leading your mind down negative paths, encouraging the worst in you that you will always remember to call on God and his angels to protect and save you from evil and the Hell that it brings.

I pray that we will all cling to Jesus as we journey from this life to the next.