

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt
First Sunday of Lent - Year B
51st Sunday of Pandemic
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Genesis 9:8-17
Psalm 25:1-10
I Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:9-15
02/21/2021

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

9In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10And 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. 11And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." 12And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. 14Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

The Gospel of Our Lord.

Prayer

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

Amen.

Beginning Again

Good morning! In case you missed it, Ash Wednesday marked the beginning of the season of Lent, those 40 days that lead up to Easter morning. Lent, not “lint,” as many a child has mistakenly confused, is more than a time to get good fish on Fridays with the Catholics. But as I discussed Lent with Bible study on Monday afternoon we came to the conclusion that it’s easy to misunderstand or be unaware of how it functions in the life of the church. Lent gets a bad rap. I’ve even heard it called the season of guilt. So, this year I figured I would help set the tone for what this time can be for all of us, especially since last year threw a wrench in things.

Oh, is last year a blur? You might not realize it, but we are approaching the 52nd week of the pandemic for St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. We had two or three Wednesday evening services and then on a Thursday Sue and I sat in the office and discussed what we would need for our “two week” shut down. I packed up some stuff in my car that afternoon, not realizing the ways our lives would be changed. For those first few weeks all we did was try to survive. The Wednesday evening soup, study, and service was replaced by me sitting in front of my phone. We did holy week on Zoom and I doubt I was the only one who felt that the normal rhythm of Lent was overtaken by a much different life.

So we begin again. One year later we gather for the First Sunday of Lent. And this time I hope to help us see how it can help our lives of faith. Lent is really just the story of Christianity boiled down to its essence. What we have here is the core of the Christian life and message. It’s the SparkNotes version. Over the next six weeks we will read passages from the Bible that help to form the heart of God’s work in the world. The Gospel

messages in particular will help to present a picture of who Jesus Christ is, and what that means for our own lives.

Lent also becomes a journey. It is not uncommon to hear the language of travel used when it comes to Lent. This is because these next 40 days tie us together with some very important journeys from the past. The 40 days of the flood we read about in our first reading, the 40 years that the Israelites walked to the promised land, and the 40 days we read about in our Gospel selection, time Jesus spent in the wilderness. It also becomes a 40 day march towards Jerusalem. Jesus will go to the holy city to save all of humankind, and we will tag along, witnesses to his story.

Like I said earlier, Lent gets a bad rap. It has become a time when we try to give something up, but inevitably fail, and so our guilt colors our perspective of the time. What's weird is that I have never read anywhere that this should be a time where we are miserable, or when we should try to feel bad. It should be a time that helps to draw us closer to God, not a time that pushes us away in embarrassment and frustration. Lent is actually about new beginnings. We see it in our readings today. In Genesis the world starts all over again, and in the Gospel the baptism of Jesus marks the start of something new. It is the same for us too. I often approach Lent frustrated about how I dropped the ball the previous year. But this isn't anything that God is trying to do to me. Again and again I am reminded that the story of humanity is a story of our failing, and God letting us start over again. And so start again I do. My Lenten disciplines have been the same these last few years. I usually try to take something away and add something new. This year I am trying to take what I eat more seriously, cutting out the snacks and extra food I seem to love so much. At the same time I'm trying to

exercise 3 times a week, which will be 3 times more than what I am currently doing. Finally, I am trying to meditate for 10 minutes every day.

Meditation is especially fitting for me. I've always had a hard time keeping my mouth shut, so it's a good discipline for me. And discipline is a good word for it. Because we often set lofty goals at the beginning of Lent, not realizing that we are trying to develop skills. The first time you try to spend 10 minutes with a clear mind you'll spend about 9 minutes and 50 seconds of it with distractions. But, like every skill or discipline, it takes time to learn how to do it. They say it takes 10,000 tries to become a master of something, so why would I think I could figure it all out in 40 days?

We start off with a story of Jesus in the wilderness being tempted. We often conjure up this image of Jesus suffering, but I want to offer up something different. What if his time alone wasn't about focusing on the many things he was giving up, but about how he was cutting out the distractions in his life that would pull him away from God's ultimate goal?

Lent can be the same for us! It's not a time to lament the loss of chocolate snacks, but a time to give thanks that we can push away some of the things that have stopped us from being closer to God! If giving up chocolate for Lent helps you draw closer to God, then great! Keep at it! But if all it does is make you feel miserable, maybe try something new. As one scholar writes; *"Implicitly, Mark's Gospel makes Lent the norm for Christian life. However it may have been for Jesus, resolution for us cannot be 'once and for all' immediate, but a matter of surrendering our imperfect conceptions and wrestling for God's meaning afresh every day."*¹ So, we're going to fail this Lent. But that's ok. God wants us to keep

¹ Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word. Year B. Vol. 2.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 48.

trying. It's not our own mastering of the seasons that matters, but the realization that without God, none of it would matter or work anyway. Amen.