

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt
First Sunday of Lent - Year B
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Genesis 9:8-17
Psalm 25:1-10
I Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:9-15
02/18/2024

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.

Springtime

Good morning! Today is the first Sunday in Lent! If you were here on Ash Wednesday you got a brief history of that service, but I felt that it might

be good to do a small overview of the Lenten season for today too. Lent was originally a time of preparation for baptism. A person who hoped to be baptized was called a catechumen, and they underwent catechumenate, or as we call it for young adults, catechism. It was an intentional time of preparation and very early on in the church Lent was 36 days, including the six Sundays where we're technically celebrating Easter and so you're TECHNICALLY given a day off of your Lenten disciplines once a week. When Ash Wednesday became more popular they added 4 days to make it the round 40 of Lent's current length to match the biblical number.

Now, somewhere along the way the season began to be seen as a time of guilt and shame. But this should never have been the case. Sure, it is a time of repentance, but the very root of the word reminds us of a different meaning. One scholar writes that *“Lent’ is from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning ‘springtime’ and so is to be understood as the holy springtime of the soul, a time for preparation, planting, and growth.”*¹ I think somewhere along the line focus shifted from our preparation and contemplation of God's amazing work to navel gazing and self-centered thought. In order to recapture that very truth I think we need to look at what Lent does. The scholar continues:

“The central event of the Christian faith is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That unitive event of cross and resurrection is the core of the apostolic preaching; it is also the central celebration of the church’s liturgy. It is set forth in the Eucharist and in the daily prayer of morning and evening. It is the focus of the church year: Lent prepares for it, and the great Fifty Days are a celebration of it. More specifically, Lent is the

¹ Pfatteicher, Philip H., and Carlos R. Messerli. *Manual on the Liturgy: Lutheran Book of Worship*. Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 1979. p. 307.

preparation for the celebration of the mystery of redemption; Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil, and the Fifty Days are the proclamation and celebration of it. It is one event, seen from two sides: cross and resurrection, each incomplete without the other.”²

We find ourselves on the first half of those two sides. Lent focuses on the cross. I have always seen this season as the entirety of the Christian story distilled into six weeks. And so our Gospel story today rightly begins at, well, the beginning. A month and a half ago we celebrated the Baptism of Our Lord where we read a piece of this same text. But where we finished then, we continue today. Immediately after Jesus is baptized the Holy Spirit drives him into the wilderness. The Greek is clear here that Jesus is forced out against his will by the Holy Spirit.

For some reason we associate the wilderness with a desert. But that isn't true. The land to which Jesus is driven is not a desert. But it IS wild. The wilderness was an age-old place of testing. Think of a wild green place with no trails and filled with dangerous animals. Added to this was the belief that angry spirits resided in the wilderness.

But you will notice that something interesting happens. The temptation in the Gospel of Mark is different from the other Gospels' accounts in that the story is very short, and has very few details. But what it does seem to suggest is something that Jesus did very often during his ministry.

He was quiet.

I have often talked about how meditation is an important spiritual discipline for me. But, while this is true, I have also left out another similar but different practice. Quiet time. Where meditation is about clearing your

² Ibid. p. 305.

mind and actively wiping the slate clean, so to speak, quiet time is about what Jesus did in the wilderness: listening. I don't think it's a coincidence that Jesus spent the beginning of his ministry in silence listening to God. Quiet time is about finding a peaceful place and just existing with God. It's not prayer, it's about sitting in the presence of our Creator and simply listening to whatever God might be trying to say. It's like a couple that's been together so long that words aren't even needed, simply being together is enough to bring comfort. And like any new relationship, silence is uncomfortable when you first begin.

Dr. Peterson, a professor from Seminary, had an interesting theory about this story. At a first glance it might seem like the wild beasts are a threat to Jesus. But Dr. Peterson argued that what was actually happening was a glimpse of the right order God had originally intended. Like at the beginning of creation human being and animal lived together in harmony. The wild beasts weren't a threat to Jesus, instead the "wilderness" became a place where, as Jesus would soon say, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near."

If we want to reclaim Lent, and the wilderness that was often a place of testing, I think it can only happen if we listen. Our God is doing wonderful and amazing things all around us all the time, we just only need to take some time to stop and listen! I pray for all of you that this season of Lent will be a time for listening. A time for you to reconnect with God, a time to sit and, as a better writer than me said, may it be a "*holy springtime of the soul, a time for preparation, planting, and growth.*" Amen.