

1 Lent Year B

2/21/2021

Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-9; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

Rev. Mark A. Lafler

Our first Sunday in Lent is today...

And (of course) our Gospel reading concerns the fasting and temptation of Jesus in the wilderness...

Where he spent 40 days.

And in typical Gospel of Mark style...

the events from Jesus baptism to his wilderness adventure...

to his preaching in Galilee is hovered over in just a few sentences.

Matthew and Luke spend a great deal of time on each event...

But St. Mark rushes through the great stories.

Now I don't think St. Mark does this because the events are not important...

Nor do I think his brevity was because he was short on paper.

I believe that St. Mark is making a point.

And that is this:

The baptism of Jesus and his suffering in the wilderness are directly tied to the power by which he proclaimed the good news of God.

St. Mark hits the highlights of the baptism and the wilderness temptation and then writes:

Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.

“The time has come,” he said.

“The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

St. Mark is tying Christ’s baptism where Jesus received his anointing and power...

And Christ’s fasting in the wilderness where Jesus received a resolve like no other...

Directly to his ministry to the world.

And I would suggest to you today...

That our baptism in Christ...

And our own wilderness adventures...

Are not only the impetus to stir us ever closer to God...

But it is from these moments with Christ that we find the resolve and the capacity to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ...

the good news to the world.

Jesus' baptism was the event where he was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah to lead us through his death and resurrection from the bondage of sin into everlasting life (BCP, 306).

Our baptism is where we are buried with Christ in his death...
and in it we share in his resurrection.

Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit...
and welcomed into the family of God...
the church.

It was in our second reading from St. Peter's letter where he wrote about baptism saying:

*...baptism... now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body,
but as an appeal to God for a good conscience,
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God,
with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.*

In baptism we find the power of Jesus Christ...

The sacramental act of identifying in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This is why in our baptism we accept Jesus Christ as our savior.

We cannot be a follower of Jesus Christ without accepting him as our savior.

And he saves us from what?

Our Sins...

the penalty of our sins...

He saves us from the power of our sins...

And eventually the very presence of sin.

And he saves us from sin because of his death on the cross...

He took our place to redeem us from sin and death.

And in our baptism, we promise to follow and obey Jesus as our Lord.

Again, we cannot be a follower of Jesus Christ without confessing Jesus as Lord.

And what does it mean that he is Lord?

It means that we no longer live for ourselves alone but for Jesus Christ.

It means we follow the commands of Jesus as revealed in Holy Scripture.

It means that when our society and world conflicts with the teachings of Jesus we choose Jesus over our world no matter the hardships it may bring.

To proclaim Jesus as Lord is to proclaim his name above every family, every nation, every rule and authority in all of creation.

It is in our baptism...

that we are making a statement both physically and spiritually...

a sacred announcement...

a sacramental act of God's grace...

that we are followers of Jesus Christ...

And we have died with him and we will rise again with him in glory.

We need the conversion of the baptismal waters to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in this world.

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And just as Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by Satan...

Fasting and praying while living among the wild beasts...

For 40 days...

He resolved to be dedicated to his calling.

Even through the hardships of this world.

We connect with Jesus and his wilderness time in this season of Lent...

Our own 40 days in the wilderness...

We are invited to observe a holy Lent by self-examination and repentance...

By prayer, fasting, and self-denial...

By reading and meditating on God's holy Word.

It is a time where we give up things that we enjoy in life...

And we take on more time in devotion to God.

In Lent we identify with Christ's wilderness calling...

Because we are called to be in union with him in his calling.

The season of Lent is to bring us closer to God...

It is not just therapy...

It is not just to help us feel good about ourselves...

It is not a communal group effort to lose weight by fasting...

Lent has been observed for hundreds of years and it is designed to help us be strengthened in Christ to receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is a time when we identify with the suffering of Christ...

Again, we turn to our second reading from St. Peter where he wrote:

Christ suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.

Lent should bring us closer to God.

We discover how needy we are.

We discover how weak we are.

We discover how broken we are.

Lent should reveal in our hearts and minds how much we need Jesus.

And through that need we draw ever closer to God.

The fasting, praying, self-denying and reading of God's holy Word is to provoke us ever closer to God.

And just as Jesus was baptized and then observed fasting in the wilderness...

For St. Mark's Gospel these things were the catalyst for the proclamation of the good news of God that Jesus proclaimed.

So our receiving the sacrament of baptism and the observance of 40 days of Lent...

Should be the spark to ignite us to proclaim to the world the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The proclamation of the Gospel is the primary purpose and outcome of Lent.

Our baptism identifies Christ Jesus as our Savior and Lord...

And our identification in the suffering of Christ leads us to the power of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus.

That is that God the Father...

the creator of the whole universe...

Sent his one and only begotten Son into the world...

God-Incarnate...

To become as his creation...

Jesus Christ...

Born as a baby...

Who grew up in a poor family in the middle of a forgotten and war torn country...

He was baptized...

And tempted just as we are...

But he was without sin...

He lived his life teaching the ways of the Kingdom of God...

And then he was executed...

By the wretched ways of the crucifixion...

And on this cross he died for our sins...

The righteous for the unrighteous...

In order to bring us to God.

He rose from the grave...
And ascended to the Father...
Where he is seated in power...
And he is coming back again...
To bring the justice of God...
And to redeem all of creation...
in the world to come.

The good news is that we can have eternal life in Jesus.
Our baptism confesses it.
And our suffering points toward it.
By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can be saved.

This is the good news of Jesus...
We are not alone in this world...
We can be born anew into a new family...
The family of God...
And the Spirit of God lifts us out of the temptations and weaknesses we
have...
The Spirit of God transforms our lives from a sinful wretch to a glorious
new creation...

As the Psalmist wrote (Psalm 40:2-3):

He brought me up also out of a horrible pit,

out of the miry clay,

and set my feet upon a rock,

and established my goings.

And he hath put a new song in my mouth,

even praise unto our God:

many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.

It is the prayer of our collect this morning:

Almighty God...:

Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations;

and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us,

let each one find your might to save...

So, as we begin Lent...

Confess your baptism...

Faithfully live the observance of a Holy Lent...

And prepare for the harvest of souls...

As we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in this world.

Amen.