

Mark 1:9-15, 2015

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."

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Today is the first of 5 weekends in Lent, and through the next four weeks we will revisit other significant stories and events in Jesus' life and ministry.

This time our appointed lesson, as you heard, is from Mark's brief description of three important events in Jesus' life; his baptism, tempting in the wilderness, and the beginning of his proclamation.

In the second week we will recall the foretelling of Jesus' passion, and then the cleansing of the temple on the 3rd weekend.

The next weekend John 3:16 is the key verse you will recall, and by the last weekend of Lent we come to stories of the end of Jesus' ministry. Beginning the weekend after that, Passion Weekend, is Holy Week and Jesus' final days.

These are all important stories to recall during this time; familiar stories, stories that allow us to watch the action as Jesus carries out his ministry, proclaiming the good news, baptizing, loving His people as He calls them to repentance.

What Jesus did was hard work, demanding and sometimes unrelenting. But, as we recall the stories we are reminded how he cared for and served the people who came to him,

Changing their lives even when that meant challenging them to make changes and do things to free themselves so they could come and follow Him.

This week our gospel reading is not so much about the impact Jesus had on other people's lives, but about Him, who He is, and how his life in ministry gets started.

In this week's gospel lesson we get the overarching theme of Jesus ministry, and the design or pattern for life Jesus has set for us, baptism, struggling with life and proclaiming the good news.

If I have counted correctly this is the third time since the first of December we have had the Baptism of Jesus for our Gospel lesson.

You have heard many times that Jesus comes to the river where John is baptizing, and as He comes out of the water the Holy Spirit descends upon him,

And Jesus receives the blessing from God,
"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

But isn't it strange what happens next? That same Holy Spirit who accompanies the Father's blessing then immediately drives Jesus into the wilderness.

The Spirit doesn't go with Him, accompany him, but drives Him into the wilderness. There is no indication the Spirit stays with Jesus.

You recall the story.

Jesus is tempted by Satan during his 40 days in the wilderness with the wild beasts and no food or water.

Because this action is deliberate you would typically assume there is some purpose for Jesus being driven to a place where He will struggle with His testing and temptation.

You wonder if there is something this experience provides that is essential to Jesus' ministry,
or accomplishes some end that is not immediately apparent.

Mark doesn't tell us and so we don't know.

But these are questions we ask about Jesus' baptism as well; what purpose was served knowing that He didn't need to be baptized.

He didn't need to be cleansed or forgiven anything as he was without sin.

So why be baptized?

But, do you see the parallel with your life taking shape?

Consider your own life experience.

You who have been baptized, has your life been a bowl of cherries since then?

Or have you been tempted, have you lived in your own wilderness during some time in your life--days, weeks, maybe even years of pain and hurt, uncertainty, lack of direction, loneliness, wondering if there is a God?

Wilderness times are important times in the bible story. They go all the way back to the book of Genesis.

We could call the story of the Noah a wilderness story. Think about that time when there was nothing in the world but a lot of water, Noah, his boat floating around, his family and all those smelly animals.

And then there is Abraham as he wandered wherever God called him to go, even taking his son out into the wilderness on a mountain to offer him as a sacrifice to God;

Hagar alone and thirsty in the wilderness visited by an angel;

and of course the forty years spent in the wilderness by the Israelites after they were delivered from slavery in Egypt.

The list goes on and on.

Wilderness times were always difficult times for people filled with uncertainty, suffering, and wonder if there really was a God who loved and cared for them

The reality is that the people often brought these wilderness times on themselves.

There are those times when God would use a wilderness time to prepare the people for something to come later.

Wilderness times are important times, even for Jesus.

This wilderness time, like Jesus' baptism, is one of the ways that He is brought into communion with the people of His day, a common experience they share, and into communion with us by our common experience.

His baptism, wilderness temptation and suffering are a bond of commonality we share with him, and a way He draws closer to us.

You remember the passage from Philippians 2:5-8;

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, Who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

God has done all He can do to make himself relatable, accessible, understandable to you, done everything He can to put himself within your reach.

He was baptized unnecessarily, he struggled with the temptation you struggle with, He suffered the pain and death you will have.

But we also notice that Jesus was never left alone in His struggles. In our gospel lesson the angels came and waited on him.

I wanted to make sure I knew exactly what was meant by that,

To know if they were just hanging out waiting for Jesus to get done with it and get back to civilization, so I went back to the Greek word translated “waited on” and found that the angels waited on Jesus as an excellent waiter or waitress waits on you in a restaurant.

They served Him as a servant cares for their master or king; or their God.

You are never left alone either.

God’s holy, and maybe not so Holy angels wait on you too.

You have heard the stories of God’s holy angels coming and saving people or protecting them from harm.

They come to you also.

But, a good part of God's holy care comes from the not so holy angels in your life.

The family member who sits at your bedside and nurses you to health, the friend who listens to your sorrows and brings healing, doctor who provides your medical treatment, the stranger,

your family of faith, each of you, as you care for one another offering prayer when you need it,
Love when you aren't so loveable
Grace when you make mistakes,
Kindness when you are alone.

Sounds a little bit like Jesus' ministry doesn't it.

Jesus is baptized, driven into the wilderness, tempted and carried out his ministry so that He could be closer to you,

to show you how to be the baptized, the wilderness wonderers, and at the same time God's Holy angels who wait on one another, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with the community and the world.

Amen