

February 26, 2012 – First Sunday of Lent
Remember Who You Are
Mark 1:9-15

⁹ One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. ¹⁰ As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy."

¹² The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, ¹³ where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him.

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I asked those who receive my "Good Morning!" daily email to respond to the following question: *What's the first thing you think of when you think of Lent?* Here are some of the replies I received:

1. The first thing I think about when I think of Lent is the sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross and the precious blood that was shed for our sins. When I reflect on the love that my Savior has for me, a lowly sinner, I can't even find the words to express my gratitude to Him. That love makes me feel truly blessed and complete.
2. I think of the last days of Jesus' life on earth before he was crucified and died for my sins. I seem to be more reflective this time of year than any other. I don't think that's by accident.
3. What should I give up?

I can relate to that, especially growing up in a Catholic home. I went to a Catholic school, on Ash Wednesday we would be taken from the classroom and marched in a very quiet and orderly manner to the church. There the priest would put ashes on our

foreheads, and say, "Remember man is dust, and unto dust you shall return." The ashes came from burnt palms - palms from the previous year's Palm Sunday. When I see people today with ashes they have a cross from the ashes on their foreheads, but, we used to have a circle. The priest would dip his thumb in a bowl of ashes and place his thumb on our heads, leaving us with a dot on our foreheads. I remember one year someone from my class said, "Something's wrong, something's wrong!" When ask, "What do mean, what' the matter?" And they said, "All I can see is dots in front of my eyes."

Lent also meant you had to give up something; for me it was usually candy (which my mother never had in the house anyway). Whatever you gave up during the week, you were permitted to have on Sundays. Sundays didn't count. There was also no meat eaten On Ash Wednesday and no meat every Friday of Lent. All of this was to humble ourselves and do penance or show sorrow for our sins and remember how much Jesus suffered for us. Fasting helps us draw our attention to God.

A second question I asked a response to was: *What are your hopes and dreams for this 14-week period?*

1. I hope that we as individuals and as a community of believers will truly draw closer to God during the next 14 weeks and on and on and...! Spending time reading the Word, praying, serving, seeking should be as natural as breathing to us. We definitely need to put Christ first in everything we are and everything we do. That is what I hope Ashes to Fire will accomplish.
2. I hope to think of my gratitude first thing when I wake up and the last thing I think of before I sleep. To draw closer to my Lord by being disciplined in my prayer.
3. I hope to find time to spend with the Lord each day, and to be able to build a closer relationship (with Him).

My hope also is to draw closer to God. I am praying that through repentance, faith, prayer, fasting, and the Word, we will all seek God, and be renewed, revived, transformed, and more surrendered to the sovereignty of Jesus, truly influenced by the Holy Spirit.

Since Lent is a 40 day period of fasting and seeking God, it is no surprise that we begin the First Sunday of Lent with the story of Jesus' baptism and His 40days in the wilderness, fasting and being tested.

In Mark's Gospel we encounter the person of Jesus for the first time in verse 9: One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River.

Previous to this Mark describes John the Baptist in strictly earthly, human terms—his clothing, his diet, his use of water for baptism, people confessing their sins, and one

coming who is much greater than John. But in describing the scene at the Baptism of Jesus there is a shift in Mark's language. His description is of heaven being torn open, the Spirit descending, and God speaking.

Jesus' baptism was altogether different from that of the others who had come to John. He makes no confession of sins, for Jesus was the only human being who was without sin. Instead, there is a manifestation of God.

(v10a) As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart ...

Mark does not say the sky merely opened up, but rather he describes "the heavens splitting apart," he uses a Greek verb that literally means "to tear apart." Mark uses the same verb once more in 15:38, where, at the death of Jesus, the veil or curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn apart, indicating another clear manifestation of God. From beginning to end, the life of Jesus was God's self-revelation in history.

(v10b) and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove.

When Mark describes the Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove the Greek preposition literally means "into"—the Spirit came down into Him. Jesus would later be accused of being possessed by the prince of demons (3:22). Here, Mark prepares the reader to see how utterly false that accusation would be, for the Spirit of God was upon Him. And because Jesus is endowed with the Spirit, He is also qualified to baptize others with the Spirit.

(v11) And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy."

The voice from heaven is the voice of God the Father, and we have here a picture of the Trinity: God the Father speaks from Heaven, God the Holy Spirit descending from the heavens, and Jesus being identified as God the Son.

The voice from heaven makes three statements to Jesus: You are my Son, You are dearly loved, and you bring me great joy.

These words make us think of at least three Old Testament verses. You are my Son comes from Psalm 2:7.

Psalms 2:7

"The LORD said to me, 'You are my son.
Today I have become your Father.'"

By alluding to Psalm 2, the voice from heaven establishes Jesus as God's anointed Son. Later, during the trial of Jesus, when the high priest accuses Jesus of blasphemy for claiming to be God's Son, the reader knows it is not blasphemy at all.

The next phrase, "My dearly loved Son," may allude to Genesis 22:2 where God tells Abraham ... Genesis 22:2

"Take your son, your only son... whom you love so much—and ...
Go and sacrifice Him..."

In the Transfiguration account, the heavenly voice speaks a second time and announces, Mark 9:7

"This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to him."

Immediately after that, Jesus tells his disciples about his impending suffering and death. Jesus, as God's beloved Son, does in fact become a sacrifice, as Jesus Himself said in ... Mark 10:45

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus God's only, and beloved Son, would suffer and die, sacrificed for the sins of the world.

The final phrase from the heavenly voice, "You give me great joy" or "with you I am well pleased," alludes to a servant song of Isaiah, where God says: Isaiah 42:1
"Look at my servant, whom I strengthen. He is my chosen one, who pleases me. I have put my Spirit upon him."

The heavenly voice affirms Jesus as the beloved Son and a Suffering Servant. This is who Jesus is, and when Jesus dies in utter humiliation (chap. 15), the readers know that He is still the beloved Son in whom God delights.

(v12) The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness.

The same Spirit that descended on Jesus sends Him into the desert. The Greek verb that is used has a forceful meaning of "drive or cast out," as when Jesus casts out demons. The desert is not only the place of God's affirmation of Jesus as his Son, but also the place of testing (as we see in v13). The Spirit compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness...

(v13) where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him.

Being in the desert forty days, reminds us of several Old Testament 40 day periods, such as Moses' fasting (Deut. 9:18), Elijah's journey (1 Kings 19:8), and Israel's 40-year wandering in the wilderness.

Wild animals are some of the dangers of the desert, and ministering angels are part of God's care - Psalms 91:11-13

For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go. They will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone. You will trample upon lions and cobras; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet!

Mark does not elaborate on the nature of Jesus' temptation or testing as Matthew and Luke do. In effect, the whole life and ministry of Jesus will be a battle with Satan and the powers of evil; and Jesus has come to plunder the house of Satan, as Jesus said in Mark 3:27

"Who is powerful enough to enter the house of a strong man like Satan and plunder his goods? Only someone even stronger—someone who could tie him up and then plunder his house.

(v14) Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News.

After John's imprisonment, Jesus went to Galilee, not because it was a safer place, but because the people there needed to hear the good news of God. Galilee needed to hear the Good News for many reasons. Caesar Augustus was being hailed as the good news for the world because he had brought unity and peace to a divided Roman Empire and a warring world. But some Jewish hotheads, such as the Zealots, would have none of that. They refused to bow to Rome, because for them, only God had legitimate claim to their nation. Roman authorities carefully monitored Jewish crowds in Judea lest a movement against Rome get out of hand. The so-called Roman peace in Judea was an uneasy truce at best. Given this political setting, what sort of good news was Jesus going to proclaim?

(v15) "The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!"

Here, Mark gives us a summary of Jesus' message. First, the time has come. The hopes and expectations of the past will now become a reality. God would bring final fulfillment to promises He had made in Israel's history.

The kingdom of God is near. One can imagine the astonishment of people hearing that another kingdom besides Rome was about to dawn. But Jesus was not calling people to take up arms and fight the Romans. His call was infinitely more revolutionary: "Repent of your sins and believe the Good News."

Repentance means a radical change of one's own mind. The call was to believe the good news of the kingdom of God in spite of the difficult circumstances of life in Roman-

occupied Galilee. The good news is that the kingdom of God could become a reality precisely in a world such as this.

(Mark 1:15, The Message).

“Time’s up! God’s kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message”

Today’s text confirms that Jesus is the Son of God who came to forgive the sin of the world and reclaim us for our Father in Heaven.

Lent is the beginning of a journey that ends at the cross. In Mark’s account of Jesus’ journey to the cross, this journey takes few side trips, and there are even fewer distractions.

In verse 10 God breaks through the veil that separates heaven and earth and pours out His Spirit upon the Son. The long silence is broken.

Jesus is immediately cast into the wilderness of temptation. The temptation had to do with His identity, is He really the Son of God; will the Father really protect Him. Jesus battles with Satan in the desert for forty days, and Jesus emerges from that battle victorious. His victory came from remembering who He is, the Son of God.

Jesus invites you into God’s victory. By the cross we become sons and daughters of God. The victory is assured in the midst of the battle by the presence of the Son. For the follower of Jesus, the way into the victory is the way of the cross. In verse 15 Jesus lets us know that repentance and faith is the means of appropriating the victory.

1. Are you part of God’s Kingdom, God’ family? The Good News is: You can be, by repentance – sorrow for sin and faith in Jesus to forgive your sin.
2. In what area of your life do you need victory? If your faith is in Jesus His spirit has come into you. Remember who you are – a child of God.
3. In our community in our world, where is the Good News of the kingdom of God calling for urgent action. Where is God calling you as a follower of Jesus, as a child of God to bring the hope-filled proclamation of God’s kingdom to those who are battling Satan? Where are those places in your community? To whose ears would this be Good News - That we can be Children of God if we repent and believe the message of Jesus; that lives can change if the message is believed and if we always remember who we are in Christ?

We are not alone in winning battles for God; we are sons and daughters, loved by God, sent by God, on behalf of God, for the life of the world. God is with us, The Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit – just as at Jesus’ baptism.

Jesus' path to victory was not a military conquest but by way of the Suffering Servant. What would it look like to engage the world with an urgency that was not force, domineering, insensitive or destructive? As we keep in step with the Son, remembering who we are, we live together as witnesses to the good news of the victory of God.