

Lent 1

Mark 1:9-15

March 1, 2009

Repent, believe in the Gospel!

In the name of † Jesus.

Amen.

The first Sunday of Lent has always been set aside to remember our Lord's temptation in the wilderness. Driven out by the Spirit into the wilderness alone, Jesus fasts for forty days and forty night, being tempted by Satan and living amongst the wild beasts. Having been thwarted at the slaughter of the innocents the Evil Foe tries again right at the beginning of Jesus public ministry to bring down the Father's salvific plan, by causing Jesus to sin, to put His glory before His passion, and to leave us in the darkness of our sins.

Mark doesn't really tell us much about the actual temptations that Jesus faced from the devil. For that information you have to turn to Matthew and Luke to find out three of the temptations that Jesus faced. There are times when a text is easier to preach than other times. Without the temptations listed in the other volumes of the Gospel we have to look elsewhere for what Mark wants us to focus on. St. Mark does not seem as interested in the temptations offered up by Satan nor how Jesus responds to those temptations, rather Mark seems to be more interested in what the Father is doing. We hear the last words of the Gospel reading again: **Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel."**

What is the Gospel of God? What is Mark telling us in this Gospel? What is it that we are to repent and believe? The Gospel is this: that God the Father would have the Spirit drive Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, to face starvation for days and nights on end, for the Lamb of God to face the jaws of wild animals. The Gospel is this: That the same Lord who provided a ram as a substitute for Abraham's son did not provide a sacrifice for His Son, and allowed Him to be crucified on our behalf. The Holy Gospel is this: That the Father would send His Son into this hostile world to be taken and devoured by our sins. This is the Gospel of the Lord: Praise to you O Christ.

To our ears that doesn't sound as if it is good news. It sounds more like a cruel father who has it in for his son and who probably needs to be locked away. Mark will spend the rest of his Gospel expanding on it, and showing us more details as to how it is true. Here already in the first fifteen verses of Mark we see what the season and what our whole Christian life is about: that this man Jesus, we hear and see God *for us*. In Him we see and hear the Gospel that God has done everything for us and that it is not what we do for God or for each other. For the Gospel is not something that can be done, it can only be believed.

Yet unfortunately, for many, Lent has devolved into a season not about what God has done, but about what we have to do for God. If the season of Lent still survives in the Church. The devil has convinced us that Lent is about our purpose, what I have to give up, or it just becomes another opportunity to find excuses for why we aren't very good Christians. With such thinking, its not a wonder why the narrative of our Savior's temptation is not about the Gospel to be believe, but a story to teach us only how to resist temptation. That the story of Abraham and Isaac is not a story of the Gospel to be believed, but is only a story to teach us how great our faith should be. And if the church just tells me to

believe, then believing becomes something that I try to do, and try harder at, and get better at. Lent is just another self-help project.

That is exactly what Mark is trying to avoid in His Gospel. We hear again the last words of our Gospel reading for today: **and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.”** Repent and stop bowing down to the self-help self-improvement plans. Repent and stop believing in your own believing. Repent and stop thinking you could be Abraham and do exactly what God asks. Repent and stop believing that you could be Jesus and resist the temptations of the devil. And if Christianity was based on us always resisting the temptations of the devil, by becoming like Abraham, praising God with our whole heart and all our members all the time, even during the Divine Service, which one of us would get into heaven? Yeah, that’s what I thought.

Repent and believe the Gospel!

Lent is not about my days of purpose but it is about Jesus days of purpose on our behalf. Lent is about what Jesus gave up for us. Its about Jesus becoming the burnt offering laid out on the altar and the Father not withholding the knife. Its not because the Father was committing child abuse, but because the Son wanted to do this for us. He wanted to do this for you and me.

And so the father laid the wood upon His Son. The Father took the knife and the fire. The Son is willfully bound, no screams of help, no struggles out of the cords. The Father raises the knife above the Sons neck. The knife falls and this time there is no angel no ram caught in the thicket. The blood of life pours from the Sons body. The Son of God is dead. **He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all.**

Abraham knew that if his son were to be sacrificed that it would only happen for one reason: to bring Him back to life. Abraham says: **I and the boy will go over there and worship and we will come again to you.** Abraham knew that His son would live again for God always keeps His promises. There was only one reason why Jesus had to die again, was that He could be raised again from the dead. So that through His death and resurrection, the curse of sin and death that weighs heavy on our necks would be crushed. And so Jesus died to live. He dies that we may live. He dies, and the curse of sin and death die with Him. And WE are unbound, because of the Ram's substitute. We are set free. The sin and death that bound us, is forgiven.

The place Abraham named was **The Lord will provide for On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.** That is true not only there on Mount Moriah and Isaac; not only for Mt. Calvary and Jesus, but also now for Mount Zion, the Church and you. For here in the Church you are provided for. And what? The GOSPEL! God's Grace. God for you that you may live. That you have been unbound from the chains of sin and death. In Baptism you die. You die with Christ, so that you may rise with Him. You are set free. In Holy Absolution, you die. You die in repentance, letting go of your sins and receiving Christ's gifts!. You are set free, forgiven. In Holy Communion, you die. You die as you eat the body and drink the blood of the One who died for you, that as His body and blood rose from the dead, so will yours. You are forgiven.

This is what Lent is all about. It is not about making you feel sorry enough for your sins. It is about what Jesus said: repent and believe the Gospel. That the Father would sacrifice His own dead son in order that the robes and chains of death and sin would fall off of us. That is our Joy. That as Christ has risen again so we will to. So we go back out in our daily lives, not quite the same. We are confident. For we have been provided for. He was tempted, and won. He took our sins, and won.

Who died, and won. This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none, he's judged, the deed is done.

In Jesus name.

Amen.