

2024-02-18 Mark 1:9-15 First Sunday in Lent SERMON

By The Reverend Cheryl Kester-Schmidt

We begin our Lenten journey “on the road again” with Jesus’ “greatest hits of righteousness” tour. During these next few weeks we will be hopping back and forth between Mark’s gospel and John’s as we accompany Jesus to Jerusalem and the cross.

Today’s is the familiar story of Jesus baptism, temptation, and John the Baptists’ arrest. Mark is short on the details Luke and Matthew have in their gospels. Today we will explore Christ’s temptation.

“To tempt” has at least six meanings but we will look at three to get the idea – to entice to do wrong by promise of pleasure or gain, to induce to do something, or to cause to be strongly inclined to do something. Or perhaps, in this case with Jesus’ temptation, perhaps, God wanted to see if Jesus would do what was required of him.

This might be God's purpose in times of testing. At the same time, Satan has his own purpose — to turn Jesus away from God.

Jesus has just been baptized by John, come out of the water and immediately the Holy Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. Turbulent emotions that must be swirling in Jesus. One moment He is filled with the ecstasy of his baptism and then immediately finds Himself in the wilderness experiencing the brokenness of this world.

We do not get the three acts of temptation we find in the other gospels. We are told Jesus was tempted, period – end of story. It is enough for us to know.

Questions rise - why was Jesus tempted? Why did the Son of God have to go through this? Jesus was perhaps, not so much tempted by the devil, as by the situation itself. Would He follow His Father's wishes? Would He be tempted to give the cup back to God?

We journey with Jesus to the cross and follow Him as He is tempted, by the Devil, who tries to maneuver Jesus from his course of undeserved suffering and death. Jesus moves through the temptations with renewed purpose, as he once more sets His face toward the cross of Calvary.

Jesus knew the path set before Him by His Father. The wilderness experience provided Him the resolve to do so. In the end He and His father knew He could follow that path.

We might ask - Does God tempt us? Does God put temptations in our path to see if we will follow Him? The answer is no. God does not tempt us individually, but He does allow the sinfulness of this world to tempt us.

God gave us two new commandments and we hear them every Maundy Thursday. These are a bit easier than God's expectations for Jesus. We are to love God and love our neighbor. From experience, we find them difficult to implement in the brokenness of our world.

Our baptism saves us from sin, death and the devil, yet we are tempted to break these commandments. Luther says, "We are saint and sinner simultaneously" — saint because of the saving power of Christ, and sinner, because we don't always do what God requires - loving God with our whole heart and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

No, God does not bring temptation directly into our lives. They are a part of daily living in a world that is not fully redeemed. Look around there is much to lead us away from believing in God with our whole heart and loving our neighbor as our selves.

We lift other things to God-like status as we emphasize material wants, being powerful, and seek our addictions. These in and of themselves are not wrong, but they tempt us away from God.

Perhaps, this fable will help: Once upon a time a king had a beautiful daughter. She had multiple offers of marriage but

couldn't make up her mind. She wanted a man who would love her more than he loved anything else.

Finally, she came up with a way to test the love of her suitors. An announcement was made throughout the kingdom that there would be a race and the winner would marry the princess. Every eligible man in the kingdom could participate. The only requirement was each had to profess their love for the princess more than they loved anything else.

The big day came with men rich, and poor gathered to profess their love for the princess. Just before the race, the King reminded them how wealthy he was. He did not want any man to run in vain, so the king had liberally scattered some of his finest jewels along the course. Each runner was welcome to take as many as he liked.

The race began and immediately, the runners began to find – necklaces, pendants, rings, jewel encrusted cups, swords and knives. One by one, the runners, began to fill their pockets and carry off their treasures. They were blinded by the immediate

promise of wealth, forgot the princess and their professions of love.

All except one! He pressed on, ignoring what he considered trinkets as he continued to race for the hand of the beautiful princess. He finally crossed the finish line into her arms.

My sisters and brothers, this is the way temptation works. It places things in our path meant to blind us to the kind of life God wants us to live. With God's grace we can learn to avoid temptation, we learn to walk away from those things we would make gods in our lives. With God's grace, we can keep our focus on Him and the love we have for Him. With God's grace, we love our neighbor as ourselves. This is most certainly the Good News of Jesus Christ! Amen