

Lenten Hope February 18, 2018 ***LENT 1***

Mark 1:9-15 Genesis 9:8-17

INTRO:

Lent is here.

A time to prepare our hearts for the tragedy of Good Friday.

A time to get ready for three days in the tomb.

A time to focus upon the joy of an empty tomb on Easter Sunday.

ME:

I like to find ways to deepen my faith during Lent.

You wondering if I'm giving anything up? Or, am I adding something to life?

Well, let me tell you this, If I am doing either of these things . . .

I'm not telling!

This will make more sense later.

YOU:

What are you giving up for Lent?

If I asked you personally, would you tell me?

Let's revisit that question later! But for now...

Let's turn our hearts to God in prayer as we prepare to open them to his word...

GOD:

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And 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. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." 12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

The Spirit is seen here in various divinely tangible lights. He is the gentle 'dove' hovering over the waters of baptism, as Noah's dove had hovered over the ark of salvation and the waters of judgment.

He is also the mighty Spirit of creation, hovering over the baptismal waters, out of which God will call his new creation, in the form of newly-made men and women.

It is this Spirit of power who irresistibly propels Jesus into the wilderness, the place where so many of the Hebrew prophets received their first **commission** and **revelation**, far from human civilization.

For any Australian, or anyone who has seen the movie Crocodile Dundee, 'the bush' would have the same meaning today.

For Mark's hearers, in the middle of their persecution, the sequence of baptism, Spirit, and immediate testing would have paralleled their own experience.

Back to Jesus, though:

13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

The wilderness.

In the loneliness of the wilderness, Jesus remained for forty days, this length easily mirroring the forty years of testing that Israel tracked through the wilderness.

The wilderness was, to the ancient Hebrew, a gloomy place of terror, the place of devils and unclean beasts.

There may be the some thought here of divine protection; just as God shut the lion's mouth to save Daniel, so he would preserve his servant Jesus from the wild beasts.

Just like with Israel in the desert, the angels ministered to Jesus.

In the fuller account of the temptation in the other gospels, it is made clear that the purpose of this wilderness period was that Jesus might face and conquer the peculiar temptations involved in his calling as **Messiah** before beginning his ministry.

Mark is short and direct.

He records the bare fact of the temptation itself, without any further comment or explanation of what happened.

The meaning is quite clear, especially from the story that follows:

while Israel, God's child, had failed in the desert, Jesus, God's Son, triumphed.

It is clear that Mark knew the basic content of the temptations as we see in Mark 8:33.

This is where Jesus rebukes Peter in the strongest of terms for not having the things of God in mind.

And now, let's finish reading the passage:

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

The word of God for us, the people of God...

WE:

The Gospel of Mark moves right along so that even just reading these verses can leave us a little breathless.

The kind of narrative details of Luke seem to have been stripped away so that we are left with a streamlined story that wastes no time in getting down to business.

Jesus gets baptized and *immediately* we see the Spirit come down like a dove.

It takes just a narrative heartbeat for that dove to magically transform into a different kind of bird altogether.

Suddenly the Spirit is more like a *raptor* who grabs the Son of God in its talons and then hurls him (a *vivid* verb in Greek) into the desert just like in old movies you see bouncers at a bar throw someone through a glass window and out onto the street.

This happens *immediately* after Jesus comes out of the river of baptism.

No sooner does this happen that Mark tells us very simply that Jesus was in the presence of wild animals and yet angels attended him.

Mark is a minimalist if ever there were one, but he knows exactly what keywords to throw in to alert biblically savvy readers as to what's happening.

They say that in Scripture words rarely sound a single note on the biblical keyboard:

they always form chords with other passages.

Here, the chaos of the wilderness—a symbol throughout the Bible of all those forces that oppose God—is brought out with just the reference to “**wild animals.**”

The wilderness is the sign of evil, the threat to shalom, the very opposite of God’s good cosmos as God created it in the beginning.

But Jesus takes shalom with him wherever he goes and so transforms that wilderness into a peaceable kingdom of flourishing and life.

Jesus was with the wild animals, but they did not harm him because wherever Jesus goes, the holy mountain of God follows.

So when Jesus then immediately goes into Galilee to pick up where John the Baptist left off, it is with true intensity and all the shalom-building presence of God within him that he is able to announce, “**Here comes God’s kingdom!**”

But, what is Shalom?

Timothy Keller defines the biblical concept of shalom as universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight.

Keller states, "God created the world to be a fabric, for everything to be woven together and interdependent."

Keller illustrates his point with the following picture of biblical shalom:

"If I threw a thousand threads onto the table, they wouldn't be a fabric.

They'd just be threads lying on top of each other.

Threads become a fabric when each one has been woven over, under, around, and through every other one.

The more interdependent they are, the more beautiful they are.

The more interwoven they are, the stronger and warmer they are. God made the world with billions of entities, but he didn't make them to be an aggregation.

Rather, he made them to be in a beautiful, harmonious, knitted, webbed, interdependent relationship with one another."

Then he offers a concrete example for the need to practice the Bible's call to shalom.

In large cities around the world, children are growing up as functional illiterates—largely due to school and family situations.

By the time they become teenagers, they can't read or write.

According to Keller, at that point, they're often locked into poverty for the rest of their lives.

Some people pin this problem on unjust social structures; others blame the breakdown of the family.

But nobody says it's the kids' fault.

So Keller concludes, "Nobody says that 7-year-olds need to pull themselves up by their bootstraps.

And yet, a child born into my family has a 300 to 400 times greater chance for economic or social flourishing than the kids in those neighborhoods.

That's just one example of the way in which the fabric of the world—the shalom of this world—has been broken ...

*It's not enough to do individual charity; you have to address **larger social issues.**"*

The fabric of shalom . . .

As a passage to kick off the Lenten season, there is in Mark 1 a swift strokes of profound hope.

Because no sooner is Jesus confirmed in his baptism as God's beloved Son and the first order of business is to go straight at the world's most squalid places.

Where else would the Messiah begin his work if not on skid row, in the hospice ward, at the cancer clinic, on the dementia unit at the nursing home?

These are the places that encapsulate the chaos of sin for us.

These are the wilderness places most in need of healing.

Of course Jesus has to go to the chaotic wilderness first and foremost.

Why else had he come?

This brings us to the reading from Genesis and **a flood of grace**.

On a surface level most people seem to think that the Genesis flood happened because of the *anger* and *fury* and wrath of God over sin.

That's **NOT** what Genesis says.

No, God was “**grieved**” over the state of the world he had made.

God was heartsick, sad, shattered by what the people made in his own image had become.

So he sends a flood but at some point realizes that this would not lead to a lasting solution.

So somewhere between Genesis 6 and Genesis 9, God turns from **grief** to **grace**.

Never again would he send a flood, and the rainbow would remind him and humanity of this truth.

From then on out in the Bible is all grace all the time.

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

The somber season of Lent can be, must be, filled with Lenten Hope.

YOU:

So, what are you giving up for Lent?

On Ash Wednesday we remembered that Jesus warned us about working our piety in public for people to see.

So if you still have ashes on your forehead, *take a bath!*

And if you are giving something up for Lent, or talking on a good and new practice, keep it to yourself!

God knows, **and who else really needs to know?**

CLOSE:

The season of Lent leads us to the ultimate expression of the grace we saw in Genesis after the flood:

seen in the cross itself.

God's heartbreak over sin would lead him to take all the sadness, all the tragedy of human history onto himself, and put it to death once and for all.

Actually, this was a lot harder for God to do than just letting it rain forty days and forty nights.

But if the waters of that flood left too many people dead, the waters of baptism would leave untold numbers of people forever alive to God.

Let's pray together for grace and more grace...