

March 13th, 2011
 Sermon for 1st Sunday in Lent
 St Peter Lutheran Church
 Bowie, TX
 Larry Knobloch, Pastor
 Matthew 4:1-11

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Jesus Help Me

Matthew 4:1-11 (ESV)

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴ But he answered,

“It is written, “ ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ” ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “ ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and “ ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’ ” ⁷ Jesus said to him,

“Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ” ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him,

“Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “ ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’ ” ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

1

¹ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

We have entered into the 40 days of Lent starting last Wednesday night as we observed Ash Wednesday. Lent is our season among the beasts, among the wild things, and the Gospel for today is a very good example of that.

This takes place right after Jesus' Baptism, the Holy Spirit led Him from His wonderful Epiphany or revealing at His Baptism to the fierce and lonely desert or wilderness for a battle of epic proportions, a battle with the devil. The Gospel of Mark does not record any of the temptations as Matthew does but he gives us a little better account of what the desert was really like:

“The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.”²

Matthew tells us of three of the temptations that came towards the end of the forty days, when Jesus was hungry and weak, but the devil was tempting and tormenting Jesus the entire time in the desert, probably with temptations that we could never hope to withstand, yet Jesus held firm.

But we sometimes try to forget all of the things that Jesus went through, looking the other way, because if we look too closely we might discover a very scary fact...that we, by nature are the beasts! This story is our story.

² *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

As shocking as it may sound, even our children know that it is true. Look at the stories that have been told over the years. The Brothers Grimm came up with many early tales involving children. We have softened up these stories, calling them Grimm's fairy tales, but they have their basis in cold, scary stories that originally involved cannibalism, witchcraft, and murder.

Even the more contemporary tale, Maurice Sendak's, "*Where the Wild Things Are*", is about a rambunctious little boy named Max who leaves his loving home to live in a place where he can be king of the other monsters and beasts. Our true nature running strong, away from Jesus' love, just as Max ran away from his mothers love to a place where he could be a bad boy and run amongst the evil things.

We are never quite happy enough with the blessings that we have by the Grace of God and are always certain that we can come up with something better on our own, often times running with the wild things and the beasts to get where we want to go. This is the scariest thing of all, on our own, we prefer the wild things, in our heart we are still a beast.

That is not how we were designed. From creation, we were never meant to be that way, but when Adam and Eve listened to the devil in the guise of a snake, they were tempted and succumbed to the temptation when the devil asked: "*Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?*"³

Once fallen, we are quite unable to pick ourselves up.

³ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version*. Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

Dead men, even just spiritually dead men, cannot bring themselves back to life, but they can be brought back to life. The antidote for all of these afflictions comes from outside of ourselves, by way of Christmas, Epiphany, and His Baptism. At the Baptism of our Lord, Jesus is revealed as the Son of God and then sent into temptation, suffering, and an atoning death upon the cross, once for all. This springs forward to our Baptism, our absolution. He gives us His Righteousness and merit for free, forgiving us of all of our sins. All of this is ours, freely given by God's Grace through the willing sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Yes, we are the wild things, the beasts,
but the good news—we are forgiven.

Despite all of this, we sometimes still look to the wild places as we succumb to temptation. Sometimes we would rather be strong, wild, and free rather than an obedient, forgiven servant. It's true for us as the tempter asks us and we begin to wonder: "Did God **actually** say not to...?"

It's for days like these that Lent was made, our season among the beasts. We can't ignore what we are; after all, the devil will not go away unless driven away with the Word of God, just as Christ drove the devil away in the desert.

So each Lenten season, we pull out the ashes on Ash Wednesday, hearing the phrase "from dust you came and to dust you will return." This is the law, the kind meant to convict and crush us, stopping us in our tracks, but we need that to turn us to the Savior.

So we pause for forty days, Ash Wednesday until Easter, (not counting Sundays) led by the Spirit, fleeing our own beasts in the wilderness of our hearts

and even fleeing satan, the beast himself, longing for Easter and the Promise of salvation that it brings.

Suddenly we find out that Lent is not only forty days of law and fighting the beast within, but there is joy also, joy in Christ our Savior. Although we began our service on Ash Wednesday with the words of death, speaking of returning to dust, we still concluded with the Gospel, reminding ourselves of our Salvation in Christ. We just can't hold it in! The Good news is still there, only veiled for a time of repentance; much like our cross will be veiled during Holy Week, awaiting Easter.

Even during Lent, we still have the joy of Christ. Looking at the forty days from Ash Wednesday to Easter, we discover that someone counted wrong—but not really. There are forty-six days between last Wednesday and Easter. Forty regular days and six Sunday feasts of Joy and Salvation, bright points during the penitential days of Lent, it's there for you and me, and for all of us during the trying times of Lent, as well as the rest of the year, as we look at the law and our inability to live by it perfectly. It's there to uplift to uplift and sustain us, much like the angels came and attended Jesus in the desert after His temptation.

We have the knowledge and assurance that Jesus did suffer and die to pay the price for our sins. If Jesus would have skipped the cross, then there would be no forgiveness, all would be lost, but He did not skip, flinch, or flee, and the price for you and me, our transgressions were paid for, there on Calvary.

Jesus came to this earth to be tempted, and yet prevail, and still he willingly suffered, and died as punishment for our sins.

We too will spend our lives being tempted and although we still face the wilderness of this world and we will suffer and face physical death, we have been baptized into Christ, into His suffering and death, but also into His resurrection. It is not that we have been spared from the deserts and wilderness as Christians, but rather in the midst of the wild things we have the assurance of eternal life and salvation through Jesus Christ. (Romans 6:1-6ff)

In closing, let us look to these words of comfort spoken to us in Isaiah: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.”⁴

Come what may, all is well. We are safe, our salvation is assured in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus,

Amen.

S.D.G
Soli Deo Gloria

⁴*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.). Zondervan: Grand Rapids