

Sermon

Lent 1B – February 18, 2024

Mark 1:9-15

In the synoptic gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – Jesus has a wilderness experience where he is tempted by Satan/the devil. John doesn't have a wilderness temptation story because he has a completely different viewpoint; but the other three do.

The three gospels agree that Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days after his baptism. They also agree that he was tempted during that time. Matthew and Luke tell us he fasted during those forty days, Mark does not. Matthew says Jesus was tempted to turn stones to bread, prove he was God's Son by jumping off the temple, and to receive ultimate earthly power by worshiping the devil. Luke reverses the second and third. Mark just tells us Jesus was tempted by Satan. And in both Matthew and Luke, we are told the devil left Jesus after his temptations failed. Luke gives us a foreshadowing of things to come when he says, "he departed from him until an opportune time." Bum buh buh bummmm.

Mark, however, doesn't mention the devil departing. This is why the temptation story in this gospel is my favorite temptation story: because the devil and temptation never leave Jesus.

In the other two gospels it's easy to rationalize away or poo-poo the temptations. Turning rocks into bread is just a magic trick designed to make you popular. Throwing yourself off the top of the temple is just stupid, because we all know God doesn't work that way. And bowing down to the devil in order to gain ultimate worldly power – well, let's just say that some people are better at not doing that than others. But that's it. That's all there is and then Jesus isn't bothered again and goes through the rest of the gospel story being Jesus.

But in Mark, the devil never leaves him. He is tempted every day until his death; not just with those big three from Matthew and Luke, but with other everyday temptations. This makes the line from today's Proper Preface, "He lived as one of us, yet without sin," that much more meaningful.

One of the reasons for the Incarnation was so we could have an example of godly living to which we could relate. Jesus embodied a perfect relationship between God and man. I cannot attain that level of perfection, nobody can. But I take some comfort in knowing that the fully human part of Jesus faced the same daily temptations as I do.

There are places where Jesus tells demons and those whom he has healed to remain silent. I'm tempted to tell everyone I know to spread the word about how wonderful I am. But spreading the good news of the kingdom shouldn't be driven by popularity.

In the gospel of Mark, the disciples are often portrayed negatively or as not getting it. I have a friend who is fond of saying, "They're called DUH-sciples for a reason." How many times was Jesus tempted to yell at them, call them names, or outright fire them because of their lack of understanding?

What were his temptations when everyone but the people of his hometown believed him? What were his temptations when his fame was such that everyone wanted a piece of him? Was he tempted to be snarky during the feeding of the 4000? What were his temptations at being asked ridiculous questions? What were his temptations before Pilate or while on the cross? The list can go on.

The doctrine of Jesus being fully human and fully divine can be hard to grasp, and even hard to accept. I've pointed out to people places in Scripture where I think Jesus made a mistake, and boy, people don't like that. But mistakes are not sins. And if we're going to proclaim Jesus as fully human and fully divine, then there are probably times he made mistakes as a fully human being. Which then leads me to think Mark was right: the devil never left Jesus and continued to tempt him throughout his ministry.

That sentence in the Proper Preface comes from Hebrews 4:15 which says, "we have [a high priest] who in every respect has been tested (tempted) as we are, yet without sin." In short, the author of Hebrews puts forth the full nature of Christ - fully human, fully divine, high priest chosen by God, tempted in every way as we are and yet without sin.

So, what can we say about Jesus? We can say he was fully human. We can say he made mistakes. We can say he was tempted every day of his life. But if we stop there we aren't seeing the whole picture. To get the whole picture we also need to pair the fully human person with the divinity of the Second Person of the Godhead.

He made mistakes, but he learned to be better. He was tempted, but he saw how that would separate him from God. His humanity saw the world as it was, his divinity saw the world as it should be. His human side submitted to his divine side, and his divine side was willing to become a servant.

In Lent we are asked to make a right beginning. What if our right beginning was to incorporate all of Jesus into our lives? Let us recognize our temptations as that which separate us from God. Let us begin to see the brokenness of the world around us and work to fill that brokenness with the healing divinity of God's presence. Let us put aside our selfish and fragile egos in favor of proclaiming the kingdom of God and serving those whom the world has harmed.

We are in the wilderness with Jesus being tempted every step of the way, like he was. Let us then make a right beginning and never tire of fighting temptation and sin as we work for kingdom goals.

Amen.