

Baptism of Jesus

Sermon February 21st

“May the words from my lips and the meditations of our hearts always be pleasing to you O God.”

Today is the 1st Sunday in Lent. Each year Lent begins with a Gospel story of Jesus being tempted and tested in the wilderness. This year our focus is on Mark. Mark’s story is very brief - we do not know what Jesus was tempted with - we do not know much at all! What Mark gives us is a call for repentance, a baptism, a time out where Jesus is tempted, and his companions are wild animals and angels.

Once Jesus emerges from the wilderness and the time of tempting he is a different man. He is the 1st citizen of the kingdom of God and he is no longer bound to others. He is ready to pronounce the Good News and to begin his ministry.

Why did Jesus have to be baptized by John, in the Jordan River. Christian tradition tells us that Jesus was without sin - that he had no need of repentance. So why did he feel called to come to John, to seek forgiveness and to be baptized?

Jesus’ embrace of John’s baptism was a public act of commitment to the way of God that John was preparing. Jesus was baptized without any confession of sin. With his baptism Jesus signals the end of his old life. His baptism is a

religious act but was also a political and economic assertion of God's lordship. Jesus is now free of any obligations to anyone or anything. Jesus is now committed only to God and God's coming rule. Jesus is now free to pursue God's call and he is empowered to do all the things that will define his ministry.

In Mark's Gospel Jesus is the only one who hears the voice - the only one who sees the Spirit descending like a dove. Jesus has a new identity - God's son - the beloved. Jesus alone experiences the heavens torn apart. When Jesus came out of the river Jordan he had a unique sense of God given identity and affirmation.

Jesus learned that he was unconditionally God's beloved son. This is the Good News that we hear in The Gospel of Jesus Christ. We too are daughters and sons of God. We too are the beloved. We too have a name, an identity. We have dignity and worth as human beings. Our lives are rooted in God's love for us.

Jesus came away from this time a changed man. A man ready to begin his ministry. A man ready for discipleship.

The Spirit revealed to Jesus that he was God's beloved son. But the Spirit also drove Jesus into the wilderness for a time of testing.

When the Spirit comes one is changed. The Spirit that came upon Jesus at his baptism sustains him when he is tested.

Jesus was driven into the wilderness for an extended period of testing. Our Scripture tells us that Jesus was tested for a period of 40 days.

In our Bible “40” is an important number. It is either 40 days or 40 years in our stories. There was the flood, Moses on Mt Sinai, Israel in the wilderness, the spies scouting out Canaan, Israel in the hands of the Philistines, the taunting by Goliath, the reigns of Saul and David and Solomon, Elijah going to Mount Horeb, Nineveh’s repentance and Jesus’ appearance after Easter.

For us the 40 days are Lent - 40 days til the Resurrection.

Our Scripture also tells us that Jesus was not alone. Jesus did not face this time of temptation all alone. We are told that the angels waited on him.

In times of testing - in times of being in the wilderness there is often alot of time to think. This can be good and it can be bad. When we are in times of struggle our minds can take us in places we would rather not be. We may focus on past events or actions or words that have harmed another. Or perhaps we focus on inaction - on words we should have said but did not. Time in the wilderness is a time of testing. Jesus

was tested - Jesus who was truly and fully human. Jesus too was forced into a time of testing. This testing - this time in the wilderness is good news for us.

If Jesus could be tested - had to be tested then we know that Jesus is with us in our times of testing - in our times in the wilderness.

Jesus was never left alone to face the testing on his own. And we are not left alone to face testing and the wilderness.

We too are accompanied by the Spirit of God - in our baptism - like Jesus and in our times when we are tempted and tested in the wilderness.

Time in the wilderness, times of testing can be very difficult. But these times can also be times of deep introspection - times of deep thought and consideration. And they can be times of repentance.

Repentance is a word and a behaviour we hear a lot about during Lent.

Repentance is not a frightening appearance before an angry God. Repentance is a homecoming to the ONE who longs to save us - to be with us in our times of trials and fears.

Repentance IS about changing our direction. Repenting is about realigning with new principles - new beliefs, new understandings, new objectives, new goals.

Times of testing - times in the wilderness can be very difficult and can make us feel that we may be facing these things alone. But times in the wilderness, times of testing also change us. We emerge differently.

Jesus came out of his time in the wilderness ready to do the work that God called him to do. We do not know what temptations or testing that Jesus endured. We do know that he went in assured of God's love. Accompanied by the Spirit and attended to by angels.

And that is the Good News we can hear today - we too are assured that we are God's beloved children & we are accompanied by the Spirit. In the wilderness, in the times of temptations and testing may you feel God's love, know the power of the Spirit and may angels attend you.

AMEN