



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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March 1, 2009
1st Sunday in Lent
Mark 1:12-15
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Genesis 22:1-18
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 3
Second Lesson: Romans 8:31-39
Gospel: Mark 1:12-15

A 40-Day Struggle

Jesus' struggle
Enables our struggle

We've really become a society of immediacy, haven't we? We want things immediately. We don't want to wait for anything. Think about it. Just watching the news, it's not enough to watch the news and wait to see the stories as they come. We also have to have it now so that they are scrolling across the bottom so we can try to listen to what they're saying and read what's actually happened so we already know what's happened before they tell us what's happened, right? We want everything quickly. We want everything fast.

That should mean I suppose for you and me that live in this society, that the Gospel of Mark is our favorite Gospel. The Gospel of Mark is all about action. It's about things happening. It's about things moving along. It's a pretty short Gospel reading today. If you look on the back of the Bulletin you'll notice the two short paragraphs. Those two short paragraphs cover almost a whole year of Jesus' ministry. Mark kind of goes from the beginning of Jesus' public ministry to almost a year later when he goes back up into his Galilean ministry. And you know the account of Jesus' temptation from the other Gospels, right? The different temptations going here, there, bow down to me, turn the rocks into stone, all this other stuff. Notice how quickly Mark sums it up? Just "boom;" there it is. "Here's what happened. Jesus went out in the dessert. The devil took him on. The devil left with his tail between his legs. Then Jesus went and said, 'believe the good news, the kingdom of God. Repent.'" Just like that. It just marches along really, really quickly. So I suppose you and I today should be in love with the Gospel of Mark because he just moves things along.

But as he moves it along pretty quickly, after he basically says to us, "Here's Lent in a nutshell. Satan defeated. Salvation completed. Any questions" - take some time to think about some of the stuff he says in there.

He might say it in only one paragraph, but did you notice he said that Jesus was out there for 40 days? Forty days! Struggled, separated from people, alone with nothing but wild animals. No helpers. No interaction - just him, led by the Spirit into the wilderness to struggle against Satan in hand-to-hand mortal combat for your soul and my soul. Then, in a very short paragraph, he talks to us about eternal consequences. What Jesus in this battle with Satan won, foreshadows the greater victory that we

prepare ourselves to celebrate during this season of Lent. And we see that his struggle really enables our struggle. We see just how desperately we need to keep our eyes focused on that good news as you and I want to live for the one who loved us enough to die for us.

Forty days and forty nights of being alone; can you picture that? Can you imagine that? I know some days it sounds pretty nice when the house is loud and noisy and you're tripping over everything everyone left around you. You might think 40 days being alone is a great thing, right? But 40 days? When was the last time you did anything 40 days straight, besides sleep and eat? Forty days when you really devoted yourself by saying, "I'm going to do this that's out of the ordinary for 40 days straight." When's the last time you did anything like that? Forty days of not just these three temptations, because we are told in Scripture that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are yet he was without sin. We are told in Scripture that Satan continually tempted Christ. These three temptations that are often listed for us in the other Gospels illustrate how Satan tempted him and how Jesus met those temptations. Every time he met them one on one with the Word of God and turning to God for strength. It gives us an awful lot of insight into Jesus' struggle. He was alone, but he wasn't alone. He was doing the will of the Triune God. He was alone, but he wasn't alone because he had all of us on his mind. Every person that has been born and has lived in this world Jesus was in the wilderness fighting for them. He was meeting every temptation because you and I don't, because you and I won't, because you and I can't. He met every temptation head on, with the Word of God, and struggled against Satan and came out victorious. It really is Lent in a nutshell this reading from Mark. Satan defeated. Jesus struggled and he won.

Then there's this statement that I can't really begin to understand. The angels came and ministered to him. The angels came and took care of him, "attended to him" it says. I guess it speaks to Jesus' humanity, his truly becoming one of us. The beings that he created as true God from all eternity now come and minister to him and attend to him and attend to, I'm assuming, his physical needs. I can't begin to fathom how the Almighty Creator would stoop to becoming human so that angels would have to come and take care of him. It's beyond true understanding except that he did it because he loves you and he loves me. He doesn't want to see us get what we deserve. He doesn't want us to have what we've got coming because what we've got coming is hell because we have given in to Satan's temptations. We were born with having given in to Satan's temptations, having inherited that sinful nature from Adam. We don't want to love God. We look at God as something that at times we think is a burden to us. He tells us to do this and do that and won't let us do what we want on our own or what our sinful nature would think is exciting or fun. He's just trying to take all the fun out of our lives by setting up all these rules. We think at times God is only about commands. Do this, don't do that. We think the only way he'd love us, I suppose if that's our only view of God, is if we keep the commands. And here's the problem, we don't, we can't and we won't. So then if we are left on our own without God working in us, we view God as the enemy because we think he's just going to punish us because we can't reach this unattainable standard he has set before us. At times we are just spiritually lazy and don't focus on the one who lived and died in our place. At times we just want to mope

and complain and gripe because that's what our sinful nature feeds on and we want to sit around and act bored by God, annoyed by God, and put off by God. I see it in faces all the time as I stand in front of people and lead worship. People that look like to me they were drug here by a spouse, by a parent, by somebody, and they look like "I'd rather be setting my hair on fire than be sitting here in the house of God and hearing about God today."

It's a shame. The God who loved you enough to defeat Satan for you did it for those of us that at times don't want to have anything to do with God. He didn't do it just for those who love him. He did it for everyone. He loved us when we were so unlovable. Can you begin to fathom that? At times we go through life craving love, craving attention. Here's God saying, "You're it! You're the most important thing to me that I left heaven, I came to earth, and I did all this for you and in your place because you can't do it." He's heaping attention on us. He's heaping his love on us, and he's the one that created us. He is so far above us and beyond us, why in the world would he stoop to love us when we are indifferent and bored by him?

It's an incredible thought, and it's what God says. So if that bores us, than I feel for us. Because Jesus did all of this, took on Satan to take away our sins so that now we live this life that is a struggle against Satan. There are a lot of struggles that you and I have in life that we don't know the outcome of, right? We don't know the outcome of the economy. We don't know the outcome of our employment. We don't know the outcome of our relationships at times. There are all these things like this that we are uncertain about and it causes all kinds of trouble.

Did you listen to the outcome of our relationship with God in today's readings? Nothing can separate us from the love of God that's in Christ Jesus. We are more than conquerors. Jesus' struggle enables our struggle and it is a struggle against our own sinful nature. It's a struggle. We at times are distracted. That's why God says to us, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news." It's very straightforward. Don't put it off any longer. The time has come.

The time has come; why? The kingdom of God is near. The kingdom of God is being established through Jesus' life and death. The kingdom of God is being proclaimed around us today through the Word and through the Sacraments. Repent and believe the good news.

Believe that what Jesus has done he did not only for the world but for you. Then live a life like we said this morning in baptism. The ongoing Christian life is a life of repentance to daily drown the old Adam through being sorry for sins and repenting of sins. It's a struggle for you and me though. We get distracted by our sinful nature, by Satan. We get pulled off in these different directions thinking that if we go there, we are going to find more peace, more joy, more happiness, and more contentment. Life will be better if only the sinful nature follows it up with a list of sins that God says to stay away from.

So we struggle. And we fight. And we fail. We fail our God. We don't always repent and believe the good news. We live for ourselves. We live according to our sinful nature. We fail. And God says, "I love you." God lifts us up, dusts us off, and says, "You are more than a conqueror through my life and death in your place."

Then we once again repent. We believe the good news, and we start this daily struggle all over again. We remind ourselves of who we are as we struggle in this way against Satan.

This morning as Ella was baptized, I made the sign of the cross from her head to her heart, right? Did you all catch that in there? It's in there, right? We remind ourselves that, just like Ella, we have been baptized into the life and death of Christ and his resurrection so that we know that we have the victory and the struggle every time we come together. We start our service by making the sign of the cross at the start of our service, at the end of our service, to remind us that we come together as people who have the victory, who have been baptized into his life, death and resurrection. As we leave worship, we are people who have the victory. We have been baptized into his life, death and resurrection. Now we go out and we face our struggles and we know we will fall, but we know that the more we focus on God, we will also succeed. That won't make God love us more. He's already loved us completely. But that is what we are, in Christ, this is what we are. And we are compelled to struggle. We are compelled to return to God when we have fallen. We are compelled to rejoice and thank God when he assures us of our forgiveness. This is the good news. We cling to it like someone in the ocean clings to a life preserver because it keeps us connected to Christ; this good news.

A 40-day struggle; we talk about in Lent the 40 days of Lent. Often many Christians will struggle and set aside something to remind themselves of Christ's suffering and his death. And if you do that, more power to you. Anything that helps you to focus on Christ, more on Christ and less on yourself, is a good thing. That struggle doesn't end in those 40 days of Lent. That struggle continues our entire life.

So fight the good fight and hang on to the one who has already said, "The victory is yours through my life and death."