

The First Sunday in Lent
March 1, 2009
Amazing Grace Lutheran - Pastor Chip Wilke

Mark 1:12-15

At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (NIV)

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil"(Genesis 1). The battle was on, and we know what happened. In a paradise graciously given to them by God, Adam and Eve fell for Satan's trap. They ate of the fruit of the tree that they were not supposed to touch and the devil gained a victory. Sin entered the world. Death came through sin. If you had a bad week of work, if you got sick lately, if you recently experienced birth pains or any kind of pain, if your marriage isn't what it seems it should be, if you know somebody who recently died, you should know these things are all a part of the devil's work.

The devil's work is still ongoing. He is still leading people into sin. He is still lying as he has been from the beginning. He is still waging a battle against the saints of God. He continues to be a murderer and a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Satan is not only a powerful adversary, but he is also a clever one. Paul writes that *"Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light"*(2 Corinthians 11).

Adam and Eve were no match for the devil. We are no match for Satan. But as John writes: *"the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work"*(1 John 3). This morning we watch the devil meet his match. We rejoice as the old evil foe's deadly woe is unable to harm our Substitute. In Lent, we witness a complete victory by our Savior. So, as we hear God's Word today, I pray we: **Sing the glorious Battle of Lent. Sing of Satan defeated. Sing of Salvation completed.**

Imagine Satan targeting you and you alone. Think of the devil constantly whispering in your ear, working on your thoughts, trying to get you to speak words that should not be spoken, tempting you into deeds that should not be done. I doubt that if Satan spent all his time on us it would take very long for us to fall - to listen to one of his lies - to be deceived by this evil one who disguises himself as an angel of light. Our flesh is weak, isn't it? Can we think of a day where we haven't sinned? Has there ever been one single day where the devil has not gotten the best of us? And the devil knows that when we sin, he's got us. Satan knows that the wages of sin is death. He knows that sin separates us from God, now and eternally.

But now there was a man who had Satan's full attention. Jesus had just been baptized and received God the Father's full approval as the Son who pleases God. Jesus had remained without sin for 30 years. Satan wants to change this. He doesn't waste any time, but comes after Jesus right away as Jesus' public ministry begins. The devil knows that if he can get Jesus to sin, just once, God's saving mission would fail. In rather short and terse words, Mark records for us: *"At once the Spirit sent him out into the*

desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.” Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness where for 40 days the devil tempts Jesus. The attacks are continuous. They are real. Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are. And Jesus was all alone. Mark mentions only the wild animals were out with Jesus as He was under the full onslaught of the devil. Jesus faced Satan all by Himself.

In a desert, all alone, we know what happened. The second Adam did not flinch, even a little. The results came in and Jesus remained without sin. Matthew & Luke record more details of three specific, clever temptations Satan threw at Jesus, and with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, Jesus won each battle. Mark only tells us that angels ministered to Jesus. God sent them to Jesus’ aide after this one on one battle with Satan was over to strengthen Jesus. Jesus triumphed over the devil, not just on the cross, but also right here at the beginning of His public ministry. We get to sing of Jesus’ victory. We get to rejoice in it. Why such reason for singing and rejoicing? Because Jesus’ victory over the devil is our victory. Jesus wins for us, in our place. His perfect life is our righteousness. God clothed us in Jesus at our baptisms. We sing of Satan defeated for Jesus defeated Satan for us.

The devil was no match for the Son of God, and as Luke tells us *“he left Jesus until a more opportune time.”* (4) Now Mark directs our attention to the message and core of Jesus’ preaching. *“After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”* There is a message Jesus kept on preaching. It was good news. Jesus says the time has come. Literally, *“fulfilled is the time...Near has come the kingdom of God.”* God saving mission is under way - the time had fully come. The good news through which all people will be blessed was at hand. The Messiah had arrived. It is time to behold the Lamb of God.

So Jesus proclaims the law and gospel in a nutshell when He says: *“Repent and believe the good news!”* Look into God’s holy law and see your sins. See how you have listened to the devil instead of God. See how you fail to measure up. Look at how you have offended your holy God & grieved the Lord. See your sins for what they are - missing God’s mark. See your sins for what they do - they damn you and separate you from God. Be sorry for them. Let your spirits and hearts be broken. But then believe the good news. Believe in the only One who can save you. Trust in Jesus who defeats the devil. Look to Him through whom come God’s grace and favor. Believe the good news - the news that Christ Jesus came to save sinners - the news that in Jesus Christ your sins are forgiven & death and hell have vanquished. The glorious battle song we sing in Lent is of salvation completed.

When Jesus preached this good news, He preached it as if it were already done. For Jesus knew the reason He had come and what awaited Him. His heel would be struck by Satan on Golgatha’s hill, but there Jesus would crush the devil’s head for all eternity. Jesus didn’t just defeat Satan in the wilderness, but Jesus delivered the final blow with His cross and empty tomb. Jesus again all alone, completely left by Himself, fought and won the glorious battle for us. He lived for us and died instead of us. He paid for all of our sins and won our holiness. Now our salvation is completed, our Savior lives, and a new paradise awaits us.

Now when Satan comes calling and he will, remember that in Christ Jesus and His Word the devil has met his match. When Satan comes accusing and he will, say with Paul: ***“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”*** Dear friends: remember we have a Savior who was tempted in every way just like we are, so that He understands the loneliness of our struggle with Satan. Jesus is always ready to be our strength through faith to resist the devil’s temptations. And when we fail and fall and sin, Jesus comes, in love, preaching once more ***“Repent and believe the good news!”*** Don’t you just love good news? There is none better than what we see in Lent! Satan defeated. Salvation completed. Jesus wins the glorious battle and the victory is all ours. It is enough to make anyone sing. Amen.