

First Sunday in Lent (B) – Mark 1:9-15

The Path of Discipleship: *Into the Wilderness*

Focus Question: *What temptations will you face this week?*

word of life

“And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.” Mark 1:12 (NRSV)

Read Mark 1:9-15

Once more the Gospel of Mark keeps the story simple. There are not a lot of details, adjectives and adverbs. Hear the urgency of this story. Mark is proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The voice at baptism is a clear one. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus and God proclaims, “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11 NRSV) All seems well as Jesus is launched into ministry and mission. The baptism of Jesus is a pinnacle experience. But Jesus does not linger, pondering the moment and mingling with the crowd.

Instead the Spirit immediately drives him into the wilderness. The Greek word used as the verb is often used to describe expelling demons. The Spirit does not give Jesus a gentle nudge towards the wilderness, but instead compels him out.

Many times we imagine God’s Spirit as comforting and encouraging. It is a jolt to realize the Spirit of God drives and pushes Jesus into a time of testing in the wilderness.

1. *Why do you think the Spirit drives Jesus to experience a time of testing?*
2. *What is the significance of the sequence of the baptism of Jesus followed by his time in the wilderness?*

There is an obvious connection between the forty days of Jesus in the wilderness and the freed slaves who spent forty years in the wilderness following the exodus. For those freed from slavery in Egypt, the forty years in the wilderness became formative and instrumental as they discovered new meaning for their identity as God’s people, chosen for purpose and blessing. It was a critical time of being tested and shaped by God. Likewise, Jesus is also being formed and tested.

3. *How might this experience in the wilderness have helped to shape the identity of Jesus?*

Unlike the descriptions of the temptation stories in Matthew and Luke, Mark does not elaborate on the types or the precise number of temptations. It seems important enough to mention, but Mark doesn’t spend time or energy on this story. Onward with the mission of Jesus!

4. *Why do you believe Mark is so brief in his description?*
5. *How important is it for you to know the type of temptations Jesus faced?*

Mark is the only Gospel to mention angels waiting on Jesus. How precious for us to observe not only the struggles and temptations of Jesus, but also the tenderness and care of the angels. Jesus was not alone in the wilderness.

6. *Take a moment to imagine this scene. How might the angels have cared for him?*
7. *What might we learn from this passage?*

word among us

The pastor gathered with the confirmation class for the weekly lesson. Someone read the temptation text from the Gospel of Mark. The pastor slowly asked, “Do you understand what a *temptation* is?” The class quickly nodded their heads. The pastor continued, “Are there temptations at your school?” The class nodded their heads vigorously.

The pastor asked one more question. “What are some of the temptations at your school?” Immediately, the class became quiet. All eyes looked downward. There was a stillness that clouded the room. Dare the temptations even be mentioned? Would this discussion lead to confession of times when temptations had not been resisted?

The pastor could only imagine what temptations were so horrible to shut down the group. What tempts twelve and thirteen-year-olds? Slowly and after some urging, each began to talk about real issues facing a middle-school student on a daily basis – drugs, mean-spiritedness, cheating, lying, cutting class, jealousy, clichés. There were those who urged classmates to act like “big shots” by putting others down. Others tried to persuade their friends to stop studying and begin failing classes. What did school really matter? Peer pressure was intense.

The pastor listened to their stories, realizing more temptations waited each person in high school and throughout life. It was not too early to identify temptations and discern the ways to deal with temptations, trusting in the Spirit’s guidance and protection.

1. *What are your daily temptations?*
2. *Are there more temptations facing any particular generation (or age group)?*
3. *For you personally, were there less or more temptations when you were younger?*

A surprising feature of this week’s text is the Spirit’s role in driving Jesus to the wilderness. It is the Spirit who *sends* Jesus to a time of temptation. Many times we understand the Spirit as a comforter - not the one to stir us.

4. *Describe a time when you felt the Spirit stirring and testing you.*
5. *How have you grown spiritually through difficult times and testing?*

The story of the temptation of Jesus is typically read in congregations on the first Sunday of Lent, a season lasting forty days. Hopefully, the forty days of Lent will provide you with an opportunity for prayer and reflection. What draws you from God? Lent is a time to change ways and face a new direction, aligning with Christ.

6. *Toward what path of discipleship is the Spirit leading you?*
7. *How might you set aside Lent to become more meaningful?*

Prayer

Mighty Spirit, lead us to the wilderness, but do not let us go. Help us learn through the times of testing to follow Christ. Amen

Dig Deeper

Luke 4:1-13; Matthew 4:1-11



Daily Discipleship

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last word

This week identify three temptations and pray for God’s Spirit to help you.