

Text: Mark 1:9-15
Date: March 5, 2006 Lent 1 Year B
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Grace and Peace be unto you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

At the end of service today, as we leave our worship area, we will exit hearing those famous last words, "Go In Peace." As your pastor I hope that you will hear these words, and will in fact leave with a sense of peace as you have heard the gospel proclaimed and received forgiveness of your sins.

However, I am acutely aware that most (if not all of us) will in fact not leave here "At Peace." The truth of the matter is that many of the things that troubled you before you came here, will still be waiting for you when arrive at home.

The bills may still be on the counter, you may still be waiting for the doctor's office to phone you back about the tests that you had last week, strife in your family and other personal relationships will most likely not be resolved, things that you are praying for may continue to go unanswered...And at the very least, the snow is probably not shoveled.

But to us, as people who face strife, discord, poverty, illness, and despair Christ says, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (Mk 1:15) If we are troubled by so many things, how on earth can we be "good news" people?

To be blunt, our "good news" doesn't come in the form of riches, relaxation, or even health- the good news to which we speak as Christians comes from knowing God's will and love for us. Having faith in God doesn't mean that you will never get sick, that you will never experience financial hardships, or that your kids will never cause you anguish.

As an example, take Christ himself. Here in the life of Christ we are presented with a man of perfect faith. Yet he was certainly no stranger to poverty, sadness, and torture. But throughout it all he continued to love his Father in heaven and the people of this world.

Today as we begin Lent, we see to what extent Christ has gone to bring us this good news. We are told that after his baptism by John in the Jordan River, Christ was driven out into the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan.

Now while The Gospel of Mark doesn't go into detail about what these "temptations" were that Satan put before Christ, if we look at the other Synoptic Gospels (Mtt 4:1-11 and Lk 4:1-13) we are shown just what these temptations were:

1. To forsake God and turn a stone into a loaf of bread. (Mtt 4:3)
2. To put God to the tests by jumping from the top of the Temple. (Mtt 4:6)
3. Bribed with political power if Christ worshipped Satan. (Mtt 4:9)

Thankfully, Christ resisted these temptations of Satan and began his public ministry through preaching of repentance and the good news.

As hopefully each of us here knows, we are not God. Or, put differently, we are not Christ. Thus, when Satan tempts us- we don't do so well. The truth of the matter is, that as humans whom have fallen short of the glory that God has intended for us, we often fall for Satan's temptations. This is why Christ calls us to repentance. To sin is human...to offer forgiveness is divine.

Fortunately, God can use our sinfulness to transform and grow us as Christians. I would like to share with you a very short story called "The Road to Holiness":

A seeker after truth came to a saint for guidance.

"Tell me, wise one, how did you become holy?"

"Two words."

"And what are they, please?"

"Right choices."

The seeker was fascinated. "How does one learn to choose rightly?"

"One word."

"One word! May I have it, please?" the seeker asked.

"Growth."

The seeker was thrilled. "How does one grow?"

"Two words."

"What are they, pray tell?"

"Wrong choices."

Just as Satan tempted Christ in the wilderness, we too are tempted by evil. Each of us faces different temptation as the power of evil knows where we are most vulnerable or "weakest" and often strives to tempt us at those points in our personal lives. The Apostle Paul refers to these weaknesses as "the flesh". Greed, success, sex, pride, gluttony, self-righteousness, complacency...The list is near endless.

But as we hear these convicting words, the good news for us is that the power of God can be much stronger than the power of evil in our lives (Romans 5). Whether it was in the wilderness during those forty days or on the cross at Golgotha, God has over powered evil and made us a righteous people.

As we journey with Christ through these forty days of Lent, we are called to look for those areas of our life that Satan is tempting us and working to move us away from God. Lent isn't about giving up ice cream or red meat- what Lent is about is recognizing our sinfulness and seeking forgiveness from God. At this point we will hear and experience the "good news" of which Christ today speaks. (Mk 1:15)

This is the news of righteousness, grace and forgiveness. This is the Word which brings peace. This is why we conclude our time of worship with those famous words, "Go in Peace."

Yes when we get home today, the bills will still be there, the driveway will still need to be shoveled, sickness may linger, children will still parents to worry- but we will hopefully have peace because we have heard the good news. And that is the news of God's love for us.