

## Sermon for Lent 1, Year B

### The Text: Mark 1:9-14

Last week, on Ash Wednesday, the church arrived at the season of Lent. There we began another 40 days of journeying with Jesus to the Cross. Today's Gospel reading now draws us into Jesus' own 40 days in the wilderness.

Usually when we hear the word 'wilderness,' we picture a dry and harsh wasteland; a place of emptiness and loneliness, a place of vulnerability with little shelter or protection from the dangerous elements. It's a place without hope and without much of anything. It's a dangerous and threatening place, and, in Mark's account, complete with wild animals. This is the place where Jesus is to be exposed to the harshest of conditions – physically and spiritually speaking.

Why was Jesus in the wilderness? This was the very beginning of Jesus' ministry that the Father had commissioned him for. Because of his inestimable love, God sent his Son into the world in order to rescue us from the kingdom of darkness. Mark tells us that at Jesus' baptism, as he was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending upon him.

This is most significant because in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit anointed specific individuals to perform their callings: the Judges, the prophets, priests and the kings, and people like Simeon who were waiting for the consolation of Israel. All of these roles are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. He is the great deliverer, rescuing us from the Kingdom of darkness. He is the greatest of the prophets because he proclaims the gospel and works through it. He is our Great High Priest interceding for us and by his own sacrifice reconciling us to God. He is our King through whom the Father sends his Spirit to rule over us with his grace.

Mark shows that the Father has held nothing back in order to save the human race; the heavens were torn open. We are reminded of the appeal to God in Isaiah 64: "O, that you would tear the heavens and come down". Then here, at the baptism, the Lord and giver of life, that is, the Holy Spirit comes in all his fullness, anointing Jesus for his ministry of the Gospel on earth.

As soon as Jesus was baptised, he was sent by the Spirit out into the wilderness, being tempted by Satan for 40 days. We're reminded of Israel's wandering in the wilderness for 40 years on the way to enter the land that God had promised them, and how they fell to the temptation of grumbling against Moses, the leader God

had given them, and therefore against God himself. They doubted God's plan for them and weren't at all keen on doing his will at that point, and fell to the temptation of idolatry. But whereas Israel of old failed, Jesus doesn't. Jesus did not just go through this testing time so that he could sympathise with our weaknesses. He went through this to overcome it *for us* and win the victory over the devil. It's a part of the Great Exchange: your failures exchanged for Jesus' success, imputed to you through faith.

It's hard for us to appreciate what spending 40 days in a wilderness might be like—we who live in ordered communities, with people all around, lush greenery, plentiful food and water.

Yet in another way today's western society is a kind of wilderness too. The spiritual supermarket of our current time offers all sorts of philosophies and worldviews from which to pick and choose from, all promising meaning and fulfilment, but leaving spiritual consumers in a hungry and thirsty wasteland of un-fulfilment. There is a wilderness of addiction, pain and breakdown from substance abuse which promises an escape from pain but only fuels more pain. There is the wilderness of the materialistic West as marketers promise their customers that they can buy their way to popularity, which is always out of reach so that the costly treadmill of retail therapy does little to change the loneliness within. There is the wilderness of self-loathing, depression and despair of attaining self-worth through physical appearance, leaving the masses with an unachievable goal because the computer corrected images displayed everywhere are not real.

Our society lives in the wilderness of Twittersphere, where everyone has the right to be authors of truth, and where personal opinion determines moral standards. Tolerance is the great sermon that rings forth, yet on the other hand, those same preachers lead the charge to cut down anyone who dares disagree with ideas posted that are different to their own. There is the moral wilderness devoid of true love with the absence of any concern for anyone other than the great 'me'. Relationships are understood in contractual terms, commitment is viewed as irresponsible, and relational success is measured by the number of partners one has, no longer an enduring marriage relationship between one husband and one wife. There is the wilderness of aimlessness, not only amongst the youth, but now their parents are also searching for something to fill in the boredom, which usually results in abuse of others property, abuse of others, or abuse of themselves.

Though the devil is defeated by the death and resurrection of Jesus, Satan still tempts us to live the wilderness way—to go and find meaning, fulfilment, peace and satisfaction apart from God and his word. Then when we do fall, the Devil tempts us to doubt God's word in another sense: to disbelieve that the promises God makes could ever really be for us. He tempts us to believe that what we have

thought, said or done is unforgivable. He tempts us to believe there is no way God could love us. He tempts us to doubt our standing before God as his children, and tricks us that we now have to do something in addition to Jesus' work to try to win God's approval all over again.

Perhaps that's why Mark glosses over the detail and moves straight to what comes next: Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Jesus doesn't say the Kingdom of God will *come soon*. He has already said in today's text that the time *has come*. What Jesus says is that the Kingdom of God has *come near*—it is *close by*. What is needed for a Kingdom? A King! And he is the Divine King, the King from heaven of whom Psalm 95 speaks:

For the LORD is the great God,

the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth,  
and the mountain peaks belong to him.

The sea is his, for he made it,

and his hands formed the dry land.

Come, let us bow down in worship,

let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;

for he is our God

and we are the people of his pasture,

the flock under his care.

In Jesus the Kingdom of God has come near. In Jesus, God has come to earth to pour out his grace, to bring rescue from Satan, to bring forgiveness of sins, freedom and fullness of life.

Every other King would have his subjects defend him. Instead, Jesus our King, defends us all by bringing about what he says in his Gospel, working forgiveness of sins, life, salvation and peace for us.

As we, his church, are surrounded by the wilderness of today's world and still beset by Satan's temptations, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the King of kings, has won the victory. In him the Kingdom of God has come near...not just 2,000 years ago in Galilee. He has won the victory for us all and he comes to us to give us all the benefits of his triumph. In the person of Christ, the kingdom of God has come as near to us "as near gets:" at the baptismal font, as he proclaimed the Good News to you through your pastor: "I baptise you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Just as the Father held nothing back at Jesus' baptism, he also gives us the fullness of his Spirit, and he declares: "You are *my son*/you are *my daughter* whom I love; with you I am well pleased." No matter how many times we

fail and need to seek forgiveness, through Christ, we remain God's very own dearly loved child. May he, each day, grant us strength to drown the sinful nature and rise again to newness of life.

In the person of Christ, the kingdom of God has come near again this day. He stands amongst us and says, "'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.' (Matthew 11:28). He says, "Peace be with you!" not as a sincere wish, but as statement that bestows what it says. In baptism, at the Lord's Supper and anywhere and everywhere the Christian proclaims and announces God's free forgiveness in Christ, there Christ is among them. This announced and enacted Good News is from God himself. It alone actually frees us and forgives us. It alone provides the strength, as well as the secure hope needed to resist caving in out in the wilderness of the world.

In Christ, as we, his body, gather in worship, we have come into the sanctuary in the midst of the wilderness of the world; here is the Kingdom of God present and at work in with his victory for us all! Amen.



21 February 2021

FIRST SUNDAY  
IN LENT

Lent is a time to say "No" to  
sin and "Yes" to Jesus

verse for the week

The Kingdom  
of God is near!  
Repent of your sins  
and believe the  
Good News!

MARK 1:15

## Devotions



### Daily Bible Readings

S	Mark 1:9-15	The temptation of Jesus
M	Genesis 9:8-17	God's promise to Noah
T	1 Peter 3:18-22	Suffering for doing right
W	Matthew 4:1-11	Jesus' temptation
T	Jeremiah 31:31-34	A new covenant
F	1 Corinthians 10:1-13	God will provide a way out
S	Psalms 25:1-10	Prayer for guidance
S	Mark 8:31-38	Jesus predicts his death

**Discuss the bible reading. What word or phrase was important to you as you read these verses?**

## Rituals and Traditions



### PRAYER

Lord, we worship  
you; God, we  
trust in you. We  
put our hope in  
you all day long.  
Amen.

### BLESSING

May God help  
you when you  
are tempted,  
and lead you  
along his  
good path.

## Caring Conversations

Share your highs  
and lows of the  
day, or respond  
to the following  
questions:

1

What is  
temptation?  
Share about a  
time when you  
felt tempted.

2

Jesus spent  
40 days in the  
desert, where he  
was tempted by  
Satan. What do  
you think it was  
like for Jesus  
to spend that  
time alone in the  
desert?

3

How did Jesus  
fight Satan's  
temptations?  
How does God  
help us when we  
are tempted?

## Creative Response

Lent is a time to simplify our lives as a  
way to enjoy God's steadfast love and  
faithfulness.

Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are  
traditional Lenten practices.

Consider some of the following faith practices to become  
part of your daily routine:

- Pray daily and include the Lord's Prayer.
- Read the Bible regularly.
- Sit in silence for prayer and meditation.
- Eat meals with others and include a mealtime prayer.
- Fast by eating smaller portions or simpler foods.
- Nurture relationships by spending time together.
- Listen to others as you engage in conversations.
- Give a donation of time and/or money to a service organisation.
- Commit to daily acts of kindness.

### mealtime prayer

For food in a world where many walk in hunger;  
for faith in a world where many walk in fear;  
for friends in a world where many walk alone -  
we give you thanks, O Lord. Amen.

## Service



Make a "crown of  
thorns wreath" to  
serve as a home  
devotional feature.

Make or purchase a grapevine  
wreath to use as the base.

Insert six purple candles, one  
for each remaining week of  
Lent, and a white candle to  
represent Christ.

Light one candle for this next  
week, two candles for the  
week after, and so on.

Begin Holy Week (on Palm  
Sunday) with all of the candles  
lit, then extinguish one candle  
each night thereafter.

Light the Christ candle as you  
celebrate Jesus' resurrection  
on Easter Sunday.