

Lent 1

Mark 1:12-15

2/18/18

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins. To him be glory for ever and ever. (Gal 1:3-5)

Mark 1:12-15

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

What would you do if you knew you were going to die soon – let's say, in three years? Have you ever thought about that? Maybe not, we don't like thinking about our mortality. But, let's just say that somehow you knew you were going to die in three years, what would you do? Do you have a bucket list? You know, a list of things you'd like to do, places you'd like to see before you...kick the bucket...

This year, for our worship on the Sundays in Lent, the theme we will be using to focus our attention over these six weeks is *"Because He Knew..."* Jesus did know he was going to die. Not just in the sense that we all know eventually we will die too, Jesus, by the time of this text, knew he was going to die soon. He knew this because that's what God had been promising all along – ever since the Fall. At that time God said to Satan, **"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel"** (Genesis 3:15). In those words, God promised a Savior to crush Satan – if you look at the cover of the bulletin, this promise is where the first picture in the series comes from – he would crush Satan, but in the process he would be wounded. As the centuries progressed, God expounded on this promise detailing how the Savior would die.

So yes, Jesus knew he was going to die. The fact that he knew this motivated everything Jesus did during his life – especially during the last three years of his life. But it wasn't just that he knew he was going to die, he also knew he was going to rise! Today we see that Jesus, *"Because He Knew..."* he was going to die and rise again, Jesus preached the good news. But before he preached the good news. He had some work to do.

This lesson comes right after Jesus' Baptism. When Jesus was 30 years old, it was time for him to begin his public ministry, to be revealed (as we just heard during the season of Epiphany) as the God-appointed, promised Savior of all people. Mark is very brief in his account of the Temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. He simply says, **"At once the Spirit sent him out to the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him."**

The other Gospel writers give much more detail. They tell about how Satan came when Jesus was at his weakest – having fasted for those 40 days. They tell about how Satan tempted Jesus to be impatient and angry with God in time of want and need. He tempted Jesus to be arrogant, greedy, and selfish – seeking pleasure ahead of God's will. He tempted Jesus to doubt and despair of God's promises and love. Here, Mark, in very simple form, spells out the essence of Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness, really of his 33 years on earth – a fierce fight with the devil, a one-man war only he could wage and win.

Jesus went to war with the devil, he came into our world to fight this fight because you needed him. Jesus came because he knew you are going to die too. Sin has brought the curse of death into the world and no one is immune. No one is immune from death because **"All have sinned and fall short of the**

glory of God” (Romans 3:23). That means you! Sin and death go hand in hand. Jesus knew death will one day come to you because you are sinful. Jesus knew the temptations to sin that come into your life. He knows that the devil often tempts you to be impatient and angry with God in times of want and need. He tempts you to be arrogant, greedy, and selfish in times of success and plenty. He tempts you to doubt and despair of God’s promises and love. Those temptations are constantly pulling at you. Those temptations often cause us to fall. One look at the Ten Commandments shows how far we’ve fallen.

At Mount Sinai God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses so that each of us would also recognize our sin. The Ten Commandments show how far short of God’s glory each one of us has fallen. When we look at the commandments and understand God’s demand for perfection, we see that there is no hope for us to save ourselves. There’s no hope for us to work our way into heaven. There’s no hope for us to work our way out from under the curse of death.

That’s why Jesus came. He came because you are going to die. He came to rescue you from the death in hell you deserve. He came to bring you into the Promised Land of heaven.

There’s a great parallel between this temptation of Jesus and what the kids have been learning in Sunday School the last number of weeks. Recently the Sunday School lessons were about the Exodus from Egypt, God’s giving the Commandments on Mount Sinai, the wandering in the wilderness, Moses’ death, and Joshua leading the people into the Promised Land.

Moses, the great law-giver, could not lead the people into the Promised Land. Moses led them out of Egypt, through him God gave them his Commandments, Moses led the people for 40 years of wandering as a consequence of their rebellion against God, he led them all the way to the eastern shore of the Jordan River. But Moses could not lead them into the Promised Land. Instead God chose Joshua to lead the people in from the wilderness. On the East side of the Jordan River, God told Joshua, **“Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them”** (Joshua 1:6). Through Joshua, God gave the people their Promised Land.

Now fast forward about 1,500 years, and Jesus (the Hebrew version of his name, by the way, is Yeshua, or Joshua) crosses the same Jordan River. He went out to the same wilderness where the Israelites had failed so many years ago. He went out into the same wilderness where Satan’s temptations had gotten the best of Israel, where they sinned and fell away and died. He went out to that same wilderness to fight against Satan because you can’t do it yourself. Following Moses, following the Commandments, can’t get you into your Promised Land of heaven. You needed one to fight for you, you needed one to win for you, you needed one to clear the way for you to go into the Promised Land. Jesus, the second Joshua, went back out to the wilderness and fought for you to clear the way to heaven for you.

Then, after going to battle with the devil and succeeding in the face of temptation, succeeding where Adam and Eve failed, where Israel failed, where you and I so often fail, then Jesus went back into Galilee to preach the good news of the kingdom. And now we know what he preached, don’t we! He preached the good news that he was victorious in the struggle, and that he defeated Satan *for us!* He preached the good news that he would continue to be victorious *for you* all the way to the cross where Satan once and for all would be crushed *for you!*

Now Jesus calls you into his kingdom. He calls you to follow him in faith. He calls you to follow him, to struggle against sin and Satan, to struggle against temptation so that you might remain close to him. He calls you to follow him. He calls you to follow him because he's the only one worth following. He's the only one who has defeated Satan and opened the way into your heavenly Promised Land. He's the only one who was perfectly successful in facing temptation, and he's the only one who understands what you are going through when you face temptation. The writer of Hebrews tells us, **"we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin"** (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus knows how your temptations feel, he knows how you struggle. So he calls you to struggle with him, he calls you to follow him.

The Lenten call, then, is a call of repentance. It is a call to recognize how horribly destructive and painful sin is. It's a call to recognize what you sin cost God. It's a call to struggle against sin and to cling to Jesus who has crushed and defeated Satan for you.

The temptation of Jesus is always the Gospel for the First Sunday in Lent. And I'm so glad that it is! Right off the bat we see that Jesus wasn't surprised by his suffering and death. Right off the bat we see that Jesus knew all along what he was going to suffer. He knew all along that he was going to die. But Jesus willingly went to the cross to finally and completely defeat Satan for us. The temptation of Jesus shows you your almighty Savior who brings to you the good news of his victory and calls you to follow him.

So, have you thought about it, about what you would do if you knew you were going to die soon? Maybe you still don't want to think about it. Maybe it still makes you a bit uncomfortable. Or maybe you have a bucket list already forming in your head. But no matter what would find its way onto your bucket list, you know one thing already – you have heaven! You have heaven because Jesus knew he was going to die and defeat Satan for you and has brought to you the good news of his victory.

Amen

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy -- to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord ... now and forevermore. (Jude 24-25)

Amen