**Mark 1:9-15 February 21, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Mark chapter 1 here re-reading these words. “The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

2 verses. That’s all you get in Mark’s Gospel. 2 verses tell you all you need to know about this pivotal moment in the ministry of Jesus Christ. The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness by Satan is summarized into two verses, the ones you just heard. In comparative Gospels we see much more detail, Matthew chapter 4 has 11 verses dedicated to the temptation of Christ which goes into detail about the three temptations that Satan brings before Jesus and how Christ uses the words of the Scriptures to refute the lies of Satan. In Luke chapter 4 he dedicates 13 verses in a very similar way to Matthew giving specific details about the temptations and about the back and forth between Jesus and the Devil. But Mark? 2 verses. Matthew and Luke talk about the temptation to turn stones into bread, for Jesus to throw himself from the top of the temple and have the angels save him, and even to bow down before Satan to be given all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Matthew and Luke go into the details, for Mark this is all you get: “And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.” It really could be summarized to just the first half of verse 13! But in these short words are packed so much significance, especially for us as we enter into this penitential season of Lent. Here isn’t just a small event that we read quickly and move on to the next story. This is important and groundbreaking, this is the first victory that foreshadows the final victory over Satan. This is the beginning of the offspring of woman destroying the offspring of the serpent, this is Garden of Eden language, this goes back all the way to the beginning. And this is important not just in history, or in trivia knowledge about the gospels, no this is important for you specifically, for Jesus doesn’t get ex ballowed in the Greek, thrown out or sent out or drove out by the Spirit into the wilderness for himself, but as a test for you. So that you will receive his perfection and so the Law will be fulfilled for you, so you will gain entry to heaven to be with God forever. So you will see that Your Savior was tempted just as you are, and yet remains without sin.

Mark’s summary is an example of using just a few words to describe something monumental. We’ve seen that in our own lives throughout this past year. How will the history books record the events of 2020? The pandemic canceled March Madness and the Summer Olympics. There were demonstrations throughout the summer. There was an election. Short words. Not much description. Yet how many details do we remember about these events, and how will we recall our own stories throughout these days? Even just short descriptions each day of what’s going on in this pandemic are more than what we hear reported. The number of cases, the number of vaccines, the number of deaths. Think about all the effort and energy and pain. It’s more than just a few words, this is monumental and big stuff. Or even in describing moments of American History. You can summarize the battle of Gettysburg by saying, “It was a battle fought for three days during the American Civil War.” One sentence, just a simple summary, but packed into that small sentence is 3 days worth of fighting in a battle that resulted in thousands and thousands of casualties. Here was a fight that included careful strategic planning and adaptation, with artillery and cavalry charges. There’s more than just a few words here. This was a huge battle in American history.

This was a huge battle for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This was an ongoing temptation, a constant harassment and battle between Jesus and Satan. We may falsely think that Jesus is just sitting on a rock in the wilderness, or just wandering around aimlessly for 40 days waiting for Satan to come along and tempt him, but in reality as Mark records, it was 40 days of tempting, not 40 days that included tempting from time to time. Jesus faced it all, the loneliness, the lies, the hunger of being out in the wilderness without food as he was fasting. This temptation was the very opposite of what he experienced at his Baptism, where he was bathed in the purifying waters of this Sacrament that he was instituting for all people, and as he was receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. If His Baptism was the preparation, his temptation was the culmination of putting the preparation to work. That’s the biggest thing about the life of Christ He isn’t just prepared, but then he serves and goes out to do what he was prepared to do. It’s no different in our lives. Lent is a season of preparation. Last week we too bathed in the light of the Mount of Transfiguration. In the white, and the glory, but now we go about the task of preparing ourselves for the final showdown, the final confrontation and death of Jesus Christ. We must be prepared for this in a season of penitence, because the weight of what Jesus did for us has to be properly recognized. His temptation helps us see that the price Jesus paid for us was one of pain, of suffering, and of constant challenge. That he went through trials and tribulations for you, out of love and compassion, but also because it was necessary for sin to be paid for. Perfection was the standard, and blood was the price. And he persevered, he won, he triumphed, just as he did in the wilderness, amongst the wild beasts and the ministering angels. Jesus is surrounded by two very different types of angels, one that wishes to see him destroyed and to fall into sin, and the others who help him. We too are faced with the same in our lives, as we traverse this wilderness. We prayed it in the collect: “Guide the people of Your Church that following our Savior we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come.”

For we have been sent out, drove out, ex ballowed again in the Greek so to speak thrown out into the world. And it’s not a fun experience to be chewed up and spat out by a world that hates us. The transition from Transfiguration, season of Epiphany, coming right after Christmas, into Lent is similar to an experience I was blessed to have with my wife about a year ago at the Portage Point Inn. We went there in the winter time to enjoy the hot tub free of charge since we are blessed to live in Onekama. So we put on our swimsuits, even though it was freezing, and cold, and there was snow everywhere, and we uncovered the hot tub, and climbed in. It was warm, refreshing, and wonderful. Of course, there was only one problem. We had to get out of the hot tub at some point. It wasn’t bad as long as you were under the hot water, gazing out at the Lake. But when we got out, it was a drastic change. Suddenly, we were reminded it was still winter, and we were freezing. We got back inside and got dressed, but that cold, wet, freezing walk was drastically different from the warm and joyful comfort we had just experienced. That’s Lent so to speak, and I don’t say that to throw you away from coming to this place, because this preparation is essential. Nowhere does God promise you an easy life, a life only lived indoors in his house. No God calls you out into the wilderness, where you too are faced with good angels who minister to you, who watch over you, your guardian angel, and the ministering attitudes and actions of your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who sustain you, strengthen you, help to motivate and keep you going. But you also are faced with the wild beasts, the evidence that this isn’t a safe and happy area, this is a world of sin, it is corrupted with sin and full of sinners, there is real danger here.

It’s one thing to see a Lion, a tiger, or a bear in a zoo, where they are behind the bars of a cage, and where there is a moat between you and them. It’s another to see them a few hundred yards away in the wild, where there are no cages, where there is no protection, where you feel a true sense of danger being around something that has the power to destroy you.

Why do we feel so different out in the world? There are real and present evil forces out here that have the power to destroy us. Jesus walks amongst the wild beasts in his temptation, out in the wilderness where Satan himself prowls as a lion hoping to find a weakness he can exploit in his battles against the Son of God. You are in the wild, in the wilderness, surrounded by demons and Satan himself who want to exploit your weakness, your sin, and turn you away from God. There are those who hate us for being Christians, those who wish to destroy your physical body, it’s true, they exist. But why wouldn’t we be afraid of those who tempt us? The demons who poison our minds and wish to lure us away from the safety of our Savior? Why wouldn’t we be afraid of Satan? He tempted Christ, and He tempts you too. He seeks to see you suffer in the fires and torment of hell for all eternity, isn’t that a scary thought? He would love nothing more than to see you suffer for all eternity! Isn’t that scarier than a bear, than a tiger, who can only hurt you physically? This demon can hurt you spiritually! For all eternity! And we so willingly are lead into temptation, even though we pray otherwise. We so willingly go and find that our own sinful natures are tempting themselves! We don’t even need Satan to come along to tempt us we are so quick to jump into that which we know is wrong just because it feels good today. But that’s not the example we were given. Jesus won the battle, he conquered Satan and sin. We have failed, fallen, and been defeated, conquered even by our own sinful self. We need to be saved, we don’t do the saving.

Lent is a season of recognition of that fact, that Jesus wins the battle for us, not that we persevere and overcome on our own. 2 verses. A short summary, a few quick snippets of 40 days of constant struggle and pain. We shouldn’t discount that, or overlook it, we should thank our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that he did all that for us. That he went through that pain for you. 40 days he suffers, he’s out of the warm, comfortable, refreshing hot tub, if anything he leaves something far greater, the perfection of heaven, not because of anything he did or because he has to, but he does it for you. He suffers for you. This is just the start of it, and the Holy Spirit sends, throws, casts out Jesus out into the wilderness for you. God the Father sent His Son Jesus into the world, for you. Jesus willingly gives himself to this suffering, and ultimately gives his own life on the cross, for you. Here you see the entire Trinity of the One True God, working out of love for you. And you don’t have anything you can point to where you can proudly say you deserve that love. No, they give it freely, without any merit of your own.

Thanks to be to God for that work of love that saves us. Throughout these 40 days you don’t have to do anything, it’s all been done for you. Lent is simply recognizing that being enlightened to that fact, the truth of your sin, and the truth of your salvation. Lent is seeing the work of the Trinity and especially Jesus Christ for you. This is just the start. So come on Sundays, be prepared for the Passion. Come on Wednesdays, hear about the lives and actions of the witnesses of Jesus and His Passion. And when the weight of the wilderness becomes too much, and you are beat down by the beasts, the demons, your sinful self, and Satan, be carried by Your Savior. Realize he’s been carrying you the whole time and receive the forgiveness that comes from being a repentant child of God.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.