

# SURRENDER ONLY TO GOD

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**GENESIS 9:8-17**

**MARK 1:9-15**

**LENT I 2018**

**TOM WHARTENBY**

## **TODAY IS THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.**

We should expect, therefore, a Gospel story about the testing of Jesus in the wilderness. We are not disappointed; although we might be a bit puzzled. On the one hand we get less than we expect: Mark's story contains no dialogue with the devil, no three temptations of Jesus, no quoting of Scripture either by Satan and Jesus, and no fasting for forty days and nights. { What, you mean Jesus didn't give up anything for Lent? }!

On the other hand we get more than we expect. The Gospel reading begins with Jesus coming from Nazareth to be baptized. It then moves quickly to the baptism itself. Then immediately to the testing in the wilderness, and then in the blink of an eye, Jesus is back in Galilee.

So let us listen to the Church's Gospel offerings on this the First Sunday in Lent.

## **"IN THOSE DAYS JESUS CAME FROM NAZARETH IN GALILEE AND WAS BAPTIZED BY JOHN"**

**Jesus turns his back on his home, his family, his friends, and his occupation and heads south to the Judean wilderness.** There he encounters a large crowd of folks from Jerusalem and surrounding Judea. This crowd would have looked down on Jesus and would have considered him to be of no account. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" was a common taunt in their world.

If John the Baptized took any special notice of Jesus, that notice goes unreported by Mark. All we know is that he baptized Jesus along with countless others.

### **GOD, HOWEVER, TOOK SPECIAL NOTICE OF JESUS.**

As Jesus is coming up out of the water, God sends his Spirit to descend on and remain inside Jesus. As God's Spirit once hovered over watery chaos to begin the Old Creation, He now hovers over the Jordan River to begin the New Creation. God then speaks to Jesus, calling him His Beloved Son, with whom he is very pleased. He is now the King of the Kingdom of God. The scorned nobody from Nazareth has become the ultimate somebody. Jesus is now the first citizen of the Kingdom of God.

### **THEREFORE WHAT HAPPENS NEXT COMES AS A SURPRISE.**

God does not then shower Jesus with gifts. He does not wrap him in a Royal Robe befitting the anointed King of the Kingdom, nor does he place a crown upon his head. He does not make the snobby folks from Jerusalem bow down and grovel before Jesus.

Instead God's Spirit manhandles Jesus and abruptly shoves him into the wilderness where he will be put to serious testing over forty days and nights.

### **IT IS HERE WE GET LESS THAN WE EXPECT.**

Not only that, but what we get is quite puzzling. Mark tersely reports that Jesus "...was in the wilderness forty days tested by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him."

Satan we understand. Satan is the leader of all the forces opposed to the coming Kingdom of God. Satan and his minions hold the entire world captive. Here Jesus does not fast for forty days and then battle Satan, he

battles Satan throughout the entire forty days. This points to Mark's belief that Jesus battled all throughout his ministry, and that the battle still rages. The wilderness testing is but preliminary test to see whether or not Jesus can stand up to Satan.

But what about the presence of the wild beasts? Are they like the non-domesticated animals present in the first creation, the ones Adam named? Are they the group from which the serpent that tested Adam and Eve came? The ones he was wiser and craftier than? And if so, are they now agents of Satan, diabolic forces tearing the heart and soul out of humankind?

No doubt even Jesus might have been overwhelmed had not the angels dispatched by God not been with him to comfort him, to calm his doubts, and to give him strength.

### **NOTICE THAT THROUGHOUT ALL OF THIS JESUS REMAINS SILENT.**

Since he left Nazareth in Galilee, he has not said a mumblin' word. He says nothing to those who looked down on him and perhaps taunted him. He says nothing to John as he baptized him. He does not point out the dove-like spirit or mention God's voice to the surrounding crowds thereby saying, "See, I **am** special!"

Nor does Jesus speak to God here. He does not ask God for any special privileges as might befit God's son, the king. He does not ask for God, for power, or even for wisdom as Solomon did of old. He simply trusts that God will give him whatever is necessary for his Mission to inaugurate God's rule on earth.

In the wilderness Jesus does not ask to be fed or protected from harm. Jesus submits to the intense forty-day testing without complaint. He does not ask God why He is doing this to him. Jesus surrenders himself to God and accepts the fact that his mission will involve a deadly-serious and long-sustained struggle. To bring in God's rule on earth struggle is essential, because the forces of evil will not surrender the world without a fight.

## **WHEN JESUS EMERGES FROM THE WILDERNESS HE HEADS NORTH TO GALILEE.**

But he is not going home. He is not returning to Nazareth, to his family, to his friends, to his former occupation. He is no longer Jesus of Nazareth. In his baptism, he has died to his old self, and to all the entanglements of that old self. He is now the Son of God, the Lord's Servant, The Warrior King, charged with doing battle with Satan, to liberate Satan's captives, and to rescue all of creation from the corruption of sin and death. And so Jesus heads for Capernaum on coast of the Sea of Galilee. There he will begin the process of recruiting soldiers to fight alongside of him in the coming war.

## **FINALLY, JESUS SPEAKS.**

His first words in this Gospel: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." Jesus thereby declares war on everything and everyone blocking the arrival of God's rule on earth. He calls upon everyone with ears to hear to repent. That means, among other things, to believe that God has sent him to bring in His kingdom. It also means to put at the top of one's agenda doing those things which fight the enemies of God and advance the rule of God. It means to let go of all attachments that block the coming of God's rule. Jesus himself will give us the necessary guidelines to accomplish all of this.

## **ONE THING WE KNOW; THE BATTLE IS ONGOING.**

It did not end in the wilderness. It did not end when Jesus died on the cross. It will not end until the end. Jesus is calling us to be soldiers in his army. He is calling us to engage Satan and the wild beasts that roam our landscape.

Our weapons must be his weapons. We must oppose ignorance with God's truth. We must oppose bigotry and hatred with God's understanding and love. We must oppose disease by advocating the things which promote health. We must struggle against those who advocate violence as the solution to the world's problems, remembering that Jesus taught us that he who lives by the sword dies by the sword.

We must find ways to protect our children, for Jesus loved them especially and called them the very embodiment of the Kingdom of God. What we have been doing or not doing up to this point is obviously not working.

We must therefore repent; we must turn away from the old and look for new and better ways to ensure the safety of our children in our violent society. This means everything must be considered. Everything must be on the table for discussion. It is our Christian duty to press our leaders to act and to act now. Let it be said by future generations of Americans that in this matter Christians led the way.

If we do, God will send his angels to minister to us in the struggle. God's Holy Spirit will guide us. On this, the First Sunday in Lent, Jesus is calling us to repent of our old ways and to trust in the new ways he is making possible through his Spirit.

May God give us the wisdom and the courage to repent and believe in His gospel.