

1ST SUNDAY OF LENT, CYCLE B

Genesis 9: 8-15 + Psalm 25: 4-9 + 1 Peter 3: 18-22 + Mark 1: 12-15

February 22, 2015

In the Synoptic Gospels---the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke---the tempting of Jesus in the desert happens immediately after his baptism by John the Baptist. There is a natural connection between the baptism of Jesus and what follows---40 days in the desert being tested by Satan.

Jesus of Nazareth, as the Fully Human One, aligns himself completely with sinful humanity by embracing John's baptism, which is a baptism for sinners. The sinless one, Jesus, becomes one with the brokenness of every human being by being washed in the waters of the Jordan River. Then he does what every human being does daily---he enters into battle with the Father of Lies.

The same Spirit which descends upon him at his baptism propels him into the desert to do battle with the powers of evil. It is the same Spirit which strengthens him during his time of testing by reminding him of the Heavenly Father's words at his baptism:
"You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased."

The Gospel accounts of the temptation in the desert in Matthew and Luke are explicit in their account of Satan tempting Jesus around his identity as beloved son. Even though Mark's Gospel does not mention these temptations specifically, it stands to reason that Jesus, who recently heard his Heavenly Father's voice speak these powerful words of love and pleasure in him, would find Satan attacking that which is most important---his identity as Beloved Son. During this intense time of testing in the desert, Jesus' identity as Beloved Son deepens and grows as he resists the Tempter and Father of Lies.

When he is hungry, the Spirit whispers, *"Let your Father's words be your daily bread."* When he is thirsty, the Spirit reminds him, *"Drink from the living water of God's love."* When he is tired and feels like not persevering, the Spirit sustains Jesus, assuring him that he can do all things in the Father who strengthens him.

So, with the help of the angels sent by His Father to assist him during this time of testing, and by the sustaining power of the Spirit, Jesus emerges from the desert overflowing with the Good News of the Father's faithful love.

Thus, the first words out of his mouth are, “Repent, and believe in the Gospel.”

Jesus has great good news to share of God’s faithful, enduring love, but before this news can be received, repentance needs to occur. Before we can give ourselves fully to the Gospel and to the one who speaks the words of truth, we must turn away from the lies we live by. What prevents us from receiving the Good News Jesus brings--- we yield to the temptation to believe in something else.

Repentance demands finding and letting go of the beliefs which contradict the Good News, which are opposed to the gospel Jesus preaches and lives. We must identify and reject the lies on which these beliefs are built. Because Satan is the Father of Lies, he tempts us into building our lives on beliefs that are contrary to what Jesus teaches. What are some of these lies on which these destructive beliefs are built?

“If you are suffering from sickness, God does not love you.

You are no longer God’s beloved son or daughter.”

“If you have lost someone you love to death, God does not love you.

You are no longer God’s beloved child.”

Other lies whispered in our ears by the Father of Lies:

“Health and beauty are necessary for happiness OR money and lots of material stuff make life worth living.”

Or, “My welfare is more important than yours,” and its corollary,

“There is not enough for all of us, so I need to grab and hold onto whatever I can.”

“No one can be trusted.”

“You hurt me, so I have a right to revenge, or at the very least to nurture resentment toward you for the rest of my life.”

We are often not aware that we build our belief system on these lies, and other lies, which contradict the good news that we are God’s beloved children at all times and in all places.

What we are invited to believe in first of all, and last of all, and everywhere in-between, is in the Good News that we are beloved sons and daughters of God.

As we turn away from the false beliefs which drain the love and life out of us, we turn toward the Great Good News of our dignity in God’s eyes.

God takes pleasure in us, delights in us, calls us His beloved daughter, his beloved son, because by baptism that is what we have become. This is our deepest identity.

We give ourselves not only to this Good News and allow it to shape and form our life, but even more importantly, we give ourselves to the One who enfleshes the Good News of God's saving love, Jesus himself.

In doing so, we "believe" in the fullest sense of that term, for the Greek word for "believe" in the Gospel is "*pistouen*," which means "*to give one's heart to.*" So, when we believe in Jesus, we give our hearts to him, we turn toward Him and enter into a life-long relationship with Him.

TURN AWAY FROM **GREED**, TURN TOWARD THE ONE WHO BECAME POOR
SO WE MIGHT BECOME RICH IN GOD'S MERCY.

TURN AWAY FROM **ANGER**, TURN TOWARD THE PRINCE OF PEACE.

TURN AWAY FROM **ENVY**, TURN TOWARD THE ONE IN WHOM
WE POSSESS EVERYTHING OF LASTING VALUE.

TURN AWAY FROM **PRIDE**, TURN TOWARD THE SUFFERING SERVANT
WHO WASHES YOUR FEET.

TURN AWAY FROM **LUST**, TURN TOWARD THE ONE IN WHOM
ALL THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S LOVE RESIDES.

TURN AWAY FROM **SLOTH**, TURN TOWARDS THE ONE
WHO IS YOUR STRENGTH.

TURN AWAY FROM **GLUTTONY**, AND BE FILLED WITH THE ONE
WHO SATISFIES THE DEEPEST HUNGER YOU HAVE FOR LOVE.

TURN AWAY FROM **SIN**, AND TURN TOWARD THE ONE
WHO ENFLESHES THE GOSPEL.

When we repent, what we discover is that not only are we beloved sons and daughters of the Father in heaven, but we are also beloved brothers and sisters of the Son of God. Joined to Him by the power of his Spirit, we have the power to reject every lie. Joined to Him, our brother in all things but sin, we have the strength to overcome every temptation.

He has won the victory for us over the Tempter in the desert,
he has won the victory for us by his life daily poured out in love,
he has won the victory for us from the cross.

He is our brother who is also our Savior, so that even when we yield to temptation and fall into sin, he saves us there.

From the *wood* of his cross a ***new ark has been built***, which carries us through the floodwaters of sin and death into new life.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi