

Lent 1, February 21, 2021 (Mark 1:9-15; Gen 9:8-17; Ps 25:1-10)

The holy gospel according to Mark, the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter.

[While John was baptizing] ***Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”***

***At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan*** (which means “adversary”). ***He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.***

***After John was put in prison, 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!”*** This is the gospel of our Lord.

For the fourth time in the last seven weeks our gospel from Mark includes the first words Jesus spoke: **The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!**

The *good news* is that Jesus, God-in-the-flesh, has come to live a fully human life so we can be sure that God fully understands what it means to be human. There’s absolutely nothing God can’t relate to.

The *good news* is that in Jesus, the kingdom of God is now present in this life on earth. No longer do we have to wait till the “afterlife,” the “hereafter,” to live in the presence of God Almighty—of God, the all-compassionate and merciful Father.

The *good news* is, **God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not *perish*, but may have everlasting life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to *condemn* the world, but in order that the world might be *saved* through him.**

Do you hear that good news? Do you realize how very much God loves *you*?

Today two of our young people at St. John will receive their first communion, their first experience of the Lord’s Supper—the *Last Supper* Jesus ate with his disciples. The kids are excited, their parents are excited, and I hope *you* will be, too.

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Holy Communion is the second of the two sacraments celebrated by Lutherans. It follows the covenant God made with us in baptism—when we were *sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever*.

Today's scriptures are perfect for this celebration. Mark describes the baptism of Jesus, dunked in the Jordan River by John. **Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."**

Most of you here today have been baptized. Do you ever imagine God saying to you, **"You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased"**--?

Our children learned it in Sunday School: *Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong; they are weak but he is strong.* – Sing the chorus with me: *Yes, Jesus loves me, yes, Jesus loves me, yes, Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so.*

I re-wrote the words to remind us that Jesus loves us even though we are still sinners. He loves us despite the fact that we so often forget him. *Jesus knows me, this I love, he was sent from heaven above. And he knows my every sin, those without and those within.* –Sing the chorus with me again: *Yes, Jesus knows me, yes, Jesus knows me, yes, Jesus knows me, the Bible tells me so.*

Immediately after Jesus was baptized, **the Holy Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.**

The reality of our Christian life is, if God sent *Jesus* out to be tempted, we can expect no less for ourselves. The Christian life isn't without its "wilderness times." Even the strongest faith in Jesus won't keep us from illness, pain, suffering, brokenness, and death.

Even the strongest faith won't keep us from sin. God *knows* that! That's why we begin each worship service with confession. That's why we need to hear, over and over, the assurance that God fully and freely forgives us. Every time. Over and over again.

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And that's why the sacrament of holy communion is so important. It's one thing for me, as a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ, and by his authority, to declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins.

It's another thing to be able to actually *receive Christ into our own bodies*, to remember that he was born in human form so that in dying as a human, he could prove God's undying love for us. **"Take and drink, all of you. This is the new covenant. It's my blood, poured out for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins."**

As our young people partake for the first time of this blessing, my prayer is that *all of you* will claim for *yourselves* the promise of Jesus: **The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!**

Thanks be to God!