

Mark 1:9-15

February 21, 2021

“Immediately the Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness.” He barely has time to catch His breath after being baptized. The Holy Spirit is not taking Jesus out to a remote little cabin where He can spend some time relaxing, a little stargazing at night, some reading perhaps. The Spirit drives Him out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. And not after a few days following His baptism. Immediately. What’s the rush?

We’re not in such a hurry, are we? Sure, things do get hectic now and then. But we always find time for some R&R. That word immediately hardly applies to us.

St. Mark uses the word immediately with Jesus because that same word describes Satan very well. Everything Satan does he does immediately. After you were baptized, you became a target of the devil. Not after some time. Immediately. You were washed there in the blood of Christ, that blood becoming a bright red target upon your head and over your heart. This means that after your baptism you, too, were immediately out in the wilderness where Satan was waiting for you licking his chops.

He loves the wilderness. Although he works just as well in gardens. That is where he got his start in fact. But the wilderness, it is the devil’s home turf. He knows every nook and cranny. He spent forty years out there picking off and devouring God’s people. And he gained lots of experience doing that.

And just so we’re clear on this, as our collect for today points out, life here in this world is a wilderness. Satan’s wilderness. Where you live and work, study and play, it is not a garden. It’s a wilderness. Our first parents were driven out of the garden. And so your life and mine is lived out in the wilderness where Satan roams as a vicious predator.

Sometimes it takes something like a pandemic to remind us of this. And so, most certainly this pandemic in that sense was, and is, a blessing from God. Yes really. You see, Satan wants us to believe that we are living in a garden and not in a wilderness. And here’s why. If you were planning a trip out into a wild, remote area of the world, would you pack little to nothing? You would certainly load up on supplies. Food, water, and other provisions. Whatever it would take to survive out there. Yet you would not prepare in this way if you were traveling through a garden where everything you need would easily be within reach.

Satan wants you to believe that life in this world is such a garden so that we are unprepared for what it really is, a harsh spiritual wilderness.

It is alarming to consider how many of the baptized have fallen for Satan’s deception, living in such a way that they are completely unprepared. What about us? You, and me too? Have we been planning for life in this wilderness by stocking up on spiritual supplies: the food of salvation and the water of life?

What I’m asking is, you and I have a Bible. Do we actually read it? Do we pour over its pages to glean from it? Or do we mostly ignore it, refusing thereby to believe what Jesus says, *“Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* You and I have a

church – preaching, absolution, the Sacrament. Do you and I make use of these, realizing that there may come a time, like during a pandemic, when these are not so accessible?

This is Lent. It is not a time to become defensive, but a time for prayerful reflection. A time to repent. A time to fix our eyes on Jesus.

And look what He does. After His baptism, He immediately goes out into the wilderness. Why immediately? Because He is on a rescue mission. And you and I are the ones He comes out to rescue.

The truth is that none of us is fully prepared for life in this spiritual wilderness. And none of us can fend off the drooling predator Satan. And so Jesus does not take His sweet time. He goes out to do battle with the devil, not to teach us how; to defeat him for you and for me.

Jesus' time out in the wilderness is a preview of the cross at Calvary. There He would hang in that wilderness all alone, abandoned even by His Heavenly Father. There the wild animals, those who were Pharisees and Chief Priests, would mock Him relentlessly. There no ministering angels would come to His aid. Jesus went out into the wilderness of the cross all by Himself so that you and I would never be driven out into that wilderness.

Be assured, my friend. Remember that you are baptized into Christ. It is true that Jesus' blood which covers you means that you are targeted by Satan. But it also means that you are targeted by your gracious God. He sees Jesus' blood on you just as He saw it upon the doorposts of the Israelites in Egypt. Your God sees you and knows you as one redeemed by Christ the Crucified, and He forgives all your sins.

Satan may drool over you, but he cannot sink his teeth into you, for Jesus kicked the teeth out of him at the cross. Satan is all drool and no bite. His accusations cannot stick with you. You have no sin of which he can accuse you. Your sins, all of them, are forgiven. Not just for some of you. You are all forgiven.

This is why you need not fear the wilderness in which you live. For the garden of heaven is coming. And no matter what Satan says, this garden is for you. Jesus gives it to you. Now life is a wilderness. But you are not alone. Jesus has come out to rescue you. And to bring you into the garden that awaits you. Amen.