

Mark 1:9-15

About the last place you'd want to be if you were a soldier in World War I was out in "no-man's land." This was the area between the trenches. It was a wilderness filled with barbed wire. A soldier who accidentally found himself in no-man's land soon learned the reason for its name. No man wanted to be there. Enemy sharpshooters could easily pick you off. Or a well thrown grenade would spell your doom. If you were trapped out in no man's land, it wasn't very likely that anyone would come to help--at least not until the cover of darkness--and your chances of surviving until then were slim to none.

With this as a backdrop, let's visit our text for today. It's very short. St. Mark gives few details about Jesus' temptation. Matthew and Luke tell us all about the manner in which the devil tempted Him, but Mark simply says that after Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, the Spirit immediately drove Him out into the wilderness where He was with the wild animals being tempted by Satan.

How's that for being the Son of God! The Father declares from heaven: "*You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased,*" and then immediately He drives Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted and live with the beasts. No coddling, no R & R first. Just, "*With You I am well pleased; now leave, get out of here...go to the devil out in the desert!*"

That was no man's land. It was bad enough spending forty days with snakes, jackals, and other desert creatures, but this place was desolate except for Satan. It was the devil's territory. It was the land between the trenches; not filled with barbed wire, but with the sharp barbs of Satan's temptations.

And Jesus didn't accidentally wander out there; the Spirit drove Him there. This was His reward for being the Son of God with whom the Father is well pleased. No one was going to come and pull Him out of this no man's land. Jesus was there alone. Angels came to minister to Him, but not to lead Him out. No, Jesus was stuck out there, not by accident, but by the will of His Father.

What does this have to do with you? Everything! You see, God did not drive His Son out into no man's land for the fun of it. Jesus wasn't there to sharpen His skills. He went out to no man's land because you and I were trapped out there. Jesus left the safety of the heavenly trench to go out and face the enemy, our enemy, and bring us back from no man's land into the warm and welcoming arms of His Father.

Do you ever feel like a sitting duck, as though Satan has you in his sights, and he's pulling his trigger, laughing as he does, watching you fall to your knees every time he sends a volley your way? Sometimes it may seem as though the devil has launched a grenade at you because your day simply explodes with troubles and tears.

That's because you and I have found our way into no man's land. It was not by accident. We were born behind enemy lines. We were born in sin, captives of the devil. Our first parents put us there. But don't blame them for their sin; we share the blame with Adam. We are just as guilty.

But Jesus went on a rescue mission. He found you and me behind enemy lines. He sought you, He found you, He claimed you, and He returned you to the loving arms of your heavenly Father. He placed you within the safety of His family, the church. He did this through the waters of Holy Baptism. That's why Jesus was baptized before He entered no man's land. He went through those waters to find you and face your enemy. And He came back with you in His arms, pulling you through those very same waters.

You were not safe from the devil until Jesus brought you out from behind enemy lines by passing you through the waters of baptism--just as the Israelites were safe from their enemy, Pharaoh, after they passed through the waters of the Red Sea. They, too, were born in captivity there in Egypt behind enemy lines. But their baptism in those waters rescued them just as Jesus rescued you in your baptism.

End of story? Hardly. Because, like those very same Israelites, we are not content to stay put in the loving arms of our dear Father. We like to play with sin. We put ourselves in harm's way. We venture out into no man's land. We think that sitting here in the trench of this hard pew is a little over the top. We think that Bible study and Bible reading is too much time and effort spent. We get tired of living in the trench of Jesus' church. We resist His call to live the Christian life. We want to see how it is in no man's land. After all, many of our friends are out there calling us to join them. And why can't we? We can always return to the safety of our trench whenever we want to...we think.

That never happened in World War I. Soldiers were brought back, but it was often their lifeless bodies that were dragged back. They underestimated the enemy. We dare not make that mistake. And yet we do. Pretty much on a daily basis we jump the trench where our baptism placed us and go out into no man's land.

Friend, if that's where you are today, do not fear. Jesus comes out into your wilderness to rescue you. He knows which kind of wild animals are troubling you because He Himself faced all of them. He knows every weapon in Satan's arsenal. He was there in the desert with him. And it did not end there. The devil followed Him all the way to the cross. And Jesus didn't prevent him. Rather, He opened His arms to Satan's attack. He was whipped, He was beaten. Satan drove his nails into Jesus' hands and feet. He thrust his sharp thorns into His scalp.

Jesus hung there. A weak man. A man suffering. And not only that...a man condemned. Jesus took Adam's blame. He took yours and mine. That was no innocent man on the cross. He got everything that was coming to Him because God charged Him with our sin. *"He who knew no sin became sin for us."*

Satan won that battle with Jesus. His body became a corpse on the cross. Jesus died. But in losing that battle, Jesus won the war. And He won it for you. He disarmed the devil. There is no sin in your life that God charges against you. He forgives you for Jesus' sake. And so the devil's weapons are useless. He points his bony finger at you and accuses you of wrong, but he's a liar. Jesus already paid the price for your sin. Jesus already took your blame. You are...each and every one of you, completely forgiven by God.

But what happens when we do wrong today? We don't want to, but what happens when we jump the trench and head out into no man's land and play with sin and temptation? Friend, God does not leave you there. Jesus was there before, and He comes out again into your wilderness, into your no man's land, as often as it takes to keep bringing you back to the safety of your baptism...back to where His words of forgiveness are given to you; back to His Communion Table where His resurrected body and His cleansing blood make you whole again.

Jesus was not your Savior just once on a cross. He is your Savior every day. No matter where you are in life, no matter where you have been, your place is here with your loving Lord. Welcome back to the safety of the trench. Welcome home into the arms of Jesus. Amen.