
OUR RIGHTEOUS SUBSTITUTE
Sermon for the 1st Sunday in Lent, 2021
Mark 1:9-15

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Mark 1:9-15: ⁹ **In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised in the Jordan by John.** ¹⁰ **Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being torn apart and the Spirit coming down on Him like a dove.** ¹¹ **Then a voice came from heaven: “You are My Son, whom I love. With You I am well pleased.”**

¹² **At once the Spirit drove Him out into the wilderness,** ¹³ **and He was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels served Him.**

¹⁴ **After John had been arrested, Jesus went to Galilee and preached the Good News of God:** ¹⁵ **“The time has come, and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe in the Good News!”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The First Sunday in Lent is always about the temptation of Jesus for forty days in the wilderness. His temptation is recorded in three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Since our Gospel today is the account of the temptation of Jesus taken from Mark, what does he have to say about it? **“He was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan.”** That’s it. That is all that Mark has on the temptation. Matthew has eleven verses of text about the temptation. Luke has thirteen. Mark has *half a verse*.

But we also hear today of Jesus’ baptism. Every year, on the First Sunday after the Epiphany, the first Sunday after the 6th of January, we hear the account of Jesus’ baptism. Today, from Mark, we have both the baptism and temptation of Jesus. Unless we take the time to examine the context around the temptation account, we may not notice *the relationship* between the baptism and the temptation.

The concise nature of Mark's Gospel allows us to hear the account of the baptism and the temptation today. Mark writes, **"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised in the Jordan by John. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being torn apart and the Spirit coming down on Him like a dove. ¹¹ Then a voice came from heaven: "You are My Son, whom I love. With You I am well pleased."**

¹² At once the Spirit drove Him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and He was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels served Him."

Mark almost gives the impression that Jesus was still wet with His Baptism when the Spirit **drove** Him out into the wilderness. The Greek word translated as *drove* in the text has two parts. The main part means *thrown*. The other part means *out*. You could say that the Spirit threw Jesus out into the wilderness.

We should not think that the Holy Spirit threw Jesus into this temptation against His will. Instead, we should understand that Jesus knew that His mission was to defeat sin, death, and the power of the Devil.¹ Jesus knew that this temptation was coming. He knew that this was part of His vocation as our Saviour. His will and the will of the Holy Spirit were one in agreement.

The proximity of the baptism and temptation narratives in Mark also provide additional understanding of the purpose of Jesus' baptism. Jesus did not need a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins² but that it was proper for Him to be baptised *"to fulfil all righteousness"* (Matthew 3:15). It was Jesus' obligation as the Promised One to inaugurate God's plan of salvation. By insisting on being baptised, Jesus deliberately took our place as God the Father had sent Him to do. Officially the work of redemption began here and was completed on Calvary.

However, today's text gives us one more purpose. Mark writes, **"¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being torn apart and the Spirit coming down on Him like a dove. ¹¹ Then a voice came from heaven: "You are My Son, whom I love. With You I am well pleased."** This appearance of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was not just for the benefit of Jesus, John the Baptist, and the other people who witnessed

¹ Luke 9:51

² Matthew 1:4; 3:14

it. It was also an announcement to the demons of this world that the Saviour was now on the battlefield.

The idea is that this was *an intentional confrontation with the Devil*. We should not think that the Devil noticed Jesus fasting in the desert and thought to himself, *“Now that He is hungry, He will be weaker. He will be easier to tempt. This will be a good time to tempt Him.”* Instead, we should think of Jesus eager to do battle for us and the Holy Spirit encouraging Him into that battle. The leading of the Holy Spirit teaches us that this was not some random encounter between enemies. Instead, the temptation was part of God’s intentional plan at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry.

Why is this so important? The writer to the Hebrews says, *“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses. However, we have One who has been tempted in every way like us. Yet He was without sin”* (Hebrews 4:15). Why is it important that Jesus was tempted, and why is it important that He did not sin?

Jesus has earned our salvation as our Substitute. He has taken our place as the target of God’s wrath on the cross. Just as He took our place on the cross, He must also take our place under the Law. The Apostle Paul writes, *“However, when the time had fully come, God sent out His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive adoption as His sons”* (Galatians 4:4–5). In order to be our Substitute, He must experience the things we experience. He had the power to come to earth as a fully formed mature man, but He didn’t. Although He was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, yet He experienced the same period of gestation that other humans do. He experienced infancy, childhood, adolescence, and so forth. He did not just walk a mile in our shoes. He walked an entire lifetime in our shoes. He did this to be our Substitute.

As our Substitute, it was also necessary for Jesus to even experience the same temptations we do. At the same time, He must do this without sin. When we examine the Old Testament for the laws concerning sacrifices, there is one phrase that appears in the instructions for every animal sacrifice. That phrase is *“without blemish.”* Whether it is an ox, or a goat, or a ram, it had to be an animal *“without blemish.”* All these sacrifices pointed forward to Jesus, who must be *“without blemish.”* If He had sinned, even just once, then His sacrifice

on the cross had no meaning, and we would still be in our sins. That is the reason we take such comfort in the Apostle Peter's words: "*For you know that you have not been redeemed with perishable things, with silver or gold, from the worthless lives you had handed over to you from your fathers,* ¹⁹ *but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a spotless and unblemished lamb*" (1 Peter 1:18–19). We also take comfort in the words of the centurion who witnessed Christ's crucifixion and praised God, saying, "*Certainly this Man was righteous*" (Luke 23:47). The word "righteous" carries with it the connotation of legal innocence as well as holiness and right-standing before God. If Christ has even one sin, then He cannot carry our sin. The Apostle Paul writes, "*God made Him who did not know sin to be sin for us, that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Our Lutheran Confessions state, "*Christ alone is our Righteousness, who is true God and man, because in Him the divine and human natures are personally united with each other*" (Formula of Concord, Epitome, III 1). This is God's "Great Exchange." On the one side is Jesus, the One who "*did not know sin.*" He is the "*spotless and unblemished lamb*" (1 Peter 1:19).

On the other side is us. The "us" side is not a pretty picture. On the "us" side is only sin, lack of righteousness, which merits death. On the Jesus side is what the "us" side desperately needs, righteousness and holiness, which gives life.

Then came the exchange: "*God made Him who did not know sin to be sin for us.*" Note the words "*God made.*" Christ's crucifixion on Calvary with the world's sins upon Him was no accident. Isaiah writes, "*it was the will of the LORD to crush Him with suffering*" (Isaiah 53:10). The Lord had the world's good in mind. On Calvary, Christ's triumphant "*It is finished*" communicated clearly that the death penalty that the world's sin merited had been paid in full by another.

That's one half of the exchange. The other half is: "*that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.*" God, who because of Christ no longer charges the sins of the world against the world, credits the righteousness, the holiness, of Christ to the world. Christ's righteousness for mankind's sin is a great exchange indeed! No wonder when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, he could say, "*Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29).

The Gospel according to Luke informs us that “*When the Devil had finished every way of tempting Him, he left Him until another opportunity would present itself*” (Luke 4:13). We should not take this to mean that the Devil stopped tempting Jesus at the end of the forty days. Instead, we should understand that the Devil only stopped until the next opportunity, that the Devil would use every opportunity he could to tempt Jesus, and that Jesus lived a life full of temptation.

It is good for us to know that Jesus lived a human life, just like the rest of us. That life included the same temptations that enter our lives. It is good for us to know that, even though Jesus endured temptation, He never sinned. This means that when they raised Him up on the cross, He was our Substitute. He carried our sin. He suffered our punishment. He earned our forgiveness.

The ultimate sign that He never sinned was His resurrection. His resurrection assures us that He did all things perfectly. It assures us that His death in our place was a success. It assures us that we shall also rise from the dead and that we shall live with Him forever! To Him be all glory and praise. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Almighty God, heavenly Father, since every good gift comes from You, we approach You in prayer in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ our Saviour. Though we are ashamed because we are unworthy, we come with faith and confidence in Your fatherly love and mercy.

We thank You that You have given us Jesus Christ as our high priest. He knows our weaknesses, for He bore them. He knows our temptations, for He endured them, and learnt obedience by what He suffered. Grant that we may show our loyalty to You by absolute loyalty to all Your words, even when they seem baffling.

Lamb of God, slain for the sins of the world, cleanse us from our sins, and teach us obedience. Take away from us all desire to follow any will but Yours. Fill us with faith and love, that we may gladly believe and follow Your Word. Give us such trust in our heavenly Father’s protection that we always rejoice as we walk in His ways.

Holy Spirit of God, when we are led into the wilderness of testing, deliver us by Your power, and save us from the evil on every hand. Give us Your strength, and by the example of Jesus show us the victorious power of God's Word.

Strengthen and bless Your Church. We praise You for the privilege of being co-workers with You to save people. Help us not to waste the grace of God that we ourselves have already received. Open the door of opportunity for us. Fill us with a faith that claims Your grace each day and then moves us to proclaim it to others. Because Your Gospel can make many people rich, give us joy in our witnessing, no matter what sacrifices we suffer.

Uphold our homes by the Gospel. Empower all parents to be true followers of Jesus, the light of the world, so that their example of faith and obedience may help their children also to know and follow Jesus.

Pour out Your Spirit on our country, O Lord, so that in their life and work all citizens may seek to show forth Your praise, power, and glory. Give us leaders in government who rule over us with wisdom and understanding, whose only aim is to serve and protect us, and not to satisfy party politics.

Be with all those who suffer, and let them know Your concern and compassion. Be with those who grieve, and comfort them with Your promises. Be with those whose earthly pilgrimage is coming to an end, and fill them with the sure hope of eternal life in Christ.

O Father, watch over all Your people, and bring us safely through this world to the kingdom that You have prepared for all who love You. We pray all these things in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Genesis 22:1-18

¹ After these things, God tested Abraham. God said to him, "Abraham!"

He replied, "Here I am."

² God said: "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love,

and go to the region of Moriah! Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall point out to you!"

³ Abraham got up early the next morning and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He cut

the wood for the burnt offering. Then he got up and started out for the place about which God had told him. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ Then Abraham told his servants: “Stay here with the donkey and let the lad and me go over there, that we may worship! Then we shall come back to you.”

⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac and he himself carried the burning coals and the knife. The two of them went on together. ⁷ Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!”

Abraham said, “Here I am, my son.”

Then Isaac said, “Look! We have the fire and the wood where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”

⁸ Abraham answered, “God will provide Himself with a lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”

The two of them went on together.

⁹ When they reached the place about which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied up his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ However, the Angel of the

LORD called to him from heaven and said: “Abraham! Abraham!”

He replied, “Here I am.”

¹² He said: “Do not lay your hand on the boy! Do not do anything to him! For I know now that you fear God. You have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.”

¹³ When Abraham looked up, he saw behind him a ram caught by his horns in the thicket. So, Abraham went, took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ Abraham named that place “The LORD Will Provide.” It is still said today, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”

¹⁵ The Angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time. ¹⁶ He said: “‘I have sworn an oath by Myself,’ declares the LORD, ‘that, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I shall certainly bless you. I shall certainly also make your descendants as many as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will possess the city-gates of their enemies. ¹⁸ In your Descendant all the nations of the earth will be blessed, because you have listened to what I have said.’”

James 1:12-18

¹² Blessed is the man who patiently endures when he is tested, because, when he has passed the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him! ¹³ No one should say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”! For God cannot be tempted to do evil and does not tempt anyone. ¹⁴ Each person is tempted when he is dragged away and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Next, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin and, when sin has run its course, it gives birth to death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my dearly loved fellow-Christians! ¹⁷ Every act of giving that is good and every gift that is perfect comes down from above, from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change or shifting shadow. ¹⁸ As He planned, He gave birth to us by the Word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.

Mark 1:9-15

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised in the Jordan by John. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being torn apart and the Spirit coming down on Him like a dove. ¹¹ Then a voice came from heaven: “You are My Son, whom I love. With You I am well pleased.” ¹² At once the Spirit drove Him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and He was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels served Him. ¹⁴ After John had been arrested, Jesus went to Galilee and preached the Good News of God: ¹⁵ “The time has come, and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe in the Good News!”