

2.18.2024 Lent 1

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

“Saved through water”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

The appointed gospel text for the first Sunday in Lent is always the “Temptation of Jesus.” Like the saying, “the devil is in the details,” Jesus’ temptation reminds us that evil lies close at hand in the many details of our lives. Though today’s gospel from Mark mentions Jesus’ temptation only briefly, Matthew and Luke give the event in greater detail, revealing the devil in the details.

In Matthew and Luke’s account, Jesus was tested in three ways. First, Jesus was tempted to satisfy his own hunger. If he had done so, satisfying only his own hunger, and not living upon God’s word, he would not have become the living word and bread of life for all the world. Second, Jesus was tempted to save his own life, throwing himself down from the temple pinnacle and making a spectacle of himself. If he had done so, he would have temporarily become famous, perhaps gained some followers, and would be long-forgotten today. He certainly would not have saved anyone from the cross. Third, Jesus was tempted to gain total world power built upon the lie of bowing to Satan and the evil of deception. If he had done so, he would have become a temporary king and ruler like so many rulers and leaders before and after him; and he would have forfeited any right as the eternal Savior and Judge of the world who proclaims the nearness of God’s kingdom.

The devil is in the details, not only in Jesus’ testing and temptation, but also in the details of our lives, as well. Jesus shared our humanity, foreshadowing the testing that each of us undergoes in the wilderness of life. Jesus’ sharing of our humanity reminds us that the devil is in the details of our lives each day.

As we begin Lent, it’s crucial that we see the point of departure for Jesus’ testing in his baptism and equipping by the Holy Spirit. In Jesus’ baptism we might also say, “God is in the details.” After Jesus’ baptism, as he came up out of the water, he saw the Holy Spirit descending upon him like a dove. A voice spoke to him saying, “*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*” And immediately, the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness. God is in the details of baptism equipping Jesus with the Holy Spirit, claiming him as God’s Son, and calling him the Beloved. This is what God also does for us in Holy Baptism.

There is something for us to learn here. Please look at St. Mark’s unique font shaped like a dove, always hovering over this sacred space, and reminding us that the Holy Spirit is constantly with us. In

baptism each of us are called by name and claimed by God as beloved children. Baptism isn't simply a one time "won and done" event. Holy Baptism continually equips us with the Holy Spirit, cleanses and forgives us with God's word, claims us as beloved children of God, and sends us daily into the world to serve others as we point to the kingdom of God drawn near in Jesus. Baptism is God's covenant that we live out daily.

In Holy Baptism water and God's word cleanse us from sin, sealing us with the Holy Spirit. God is in the details of our baptismal life, freeing us to live in the power of the Spirit as we struggle with evil in the many bedeviling details of life. As Lent begins, I encourage you to give thanks for baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are not alone in life's wilderness of testing.

The season of Lent is a brief forty days, yet it is meant to remind us of our serious struggle with the forces of evil in this broken world. Like Noah and the Ark, humanity continues to pass through floods of death and destruction. The twentieth century passed through two world wars and the atomic bombing of two cities, countless regional wars, famine, hunger, and homelessness that we have often not done enough to prevent. There continue to be floods of racism, discrimination, and rejection of others because of their perceived difference. The recent pandemic claimed nearly 7 million lives globally, and nearly 1.2 million lives in this country. If that were not enough, now there are ongoing wars in Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan, and in the first six weeks of this year in our own nation, there have been 44 mass shootings.

Humanity continues to drown in floods of fear, tragedy, and violence. If the devil is in the details, thanks to social media and 24-hour a day television, our attention span is increasingly short and distracted, only fueling our anger and frustration with the world.

Yet we continue to satisfy our own appetites rather than living upon God's word and feeding those who are truly in need. We continue to seek to save and protect only ourselves at the expense of others, and we continue to look to temporary leaders and those made famous by their wealth and beauty, rather than looking to the God revealed in the cross of Jesus – the God who is seen in suffering love for others. We continue to pursue our own partisan attempts at power domestically and globally, rather than pointing to the nearness God's kingdom where all people are sisters and brothers, where God calls all nations and peoples "my beloved sons and daughters."

Amid of all this heartache, baptism reminds us that God is still in the details of our lives. Like Jesus, we have been given the Holy Spirit so that we might rely upon God's power and grace in our own moments of testing and temptation. Like Jesus in the wilderness, we have also been given a free

will to choose good. Whose will do you rely upon each day? Do you seek to live with God in the details as you face a bewildering and bedeviling number of decisions in your life? Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “*lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil,*” because Jesus knew firsthand the seriousness of testing and temptation in the wilderness of life.

Lent is a time for prayer, giving, and fasting. Take time for prayer during Lent. To help us with this, Lenten Devotional Booklets are available in the Gathering Place. Make time during Lent to pray not only for yourself, but for your neighbor, your enemies, and all who suffer in this world. Lent is a time to give to God’s mission through this congregation. This year, our Lenten Box offerings will go to Refugee Support Services for Infant Care Kits which will help newly arrived refugee families with newborn infants. Remembering that Jesus was born in a stable, a stranger to the town of Bethlehem, please use the Lenten Boxes to welcome the littlest strangers in our community. Lent is also a time to fast from the ways of this world that rob us of our closeness God. On Wednesday evenings during Lent, we have opportunities for fellowship and prayer. Nourished in table fellowship and a simple meal, we are also sustained by God’s word in a Service of Evening Prayer. These forty days, I encourage you to take the journey of Lent.

Jesus’ forty days of testing prepared him for ministry. Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news, saying, “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.*” Lent helps us see God in the details of our lives and in our mission as a church.

During Lent, look to this font shaped like the Holy Spirit, give thanks for your baptism, and remind yourself that God in the details of your life.

You have been called beloved by God and given the Holy Spirit so that you might offer love and hope to others in their times of testing in the wilderness. Amen.