

Mark 1:9-13

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 April 2018

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] Again, that passage is Mark chapter 1, verses 9 through 13, on page 812. In those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven. You are my beloved Son.

With you I am well pleased. The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.

And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Well, today is the first Sunday of Lent.

And the text, which was just read to us from the Gospel of Mark, was pre-selected for us by those who have a history of ordering the Church's steps through this next season, all the way from Good Friday through Easter.

[1 : 22] Now, I must confess at the outset that up until this point in my life, I've been rather ambivalent about Lent.

Now, the reasons for this are at least twofold. First, I was never exposed to the tradition growing up. But, in one sense, Lent, for me, experientially, was something with which I was entirely unfamiliar.

In fact, it would be interesting, don't plan a show of hands here, but my guess is that our own congregation runs as wide on their experience of Lent as we do on almost every other issue in life.

Those who are very familiar with it, and those who, like me perhaps, grew up in a context where they were never exposed to it. For my corner of the world, it was simply something that other branches of Christendom did.

The second reason I suppose I've been ambivalent to it was, I suspect, this underlying, unconscious, theological prejudice against it.

[2 : 42] After all, Lent comes with the practice of terms like penance, which, for us growing up, was something the Gospel got us away from.

And so I suppose that underneath the service, this idea of giving up particular things never resonated with my soul.

It almost had the appearance of medieval works righteousness to it. It was also external, also known. Even on your forehead, you commenced this journey.

And so I suspect that these two reasons are underneath my own experience. I was never exposed to the tradition, and I suspect I was theologically predisposed against the tradition.

Truth be told, there had to be some latent, unconscious hubris in my corners of Christian experience. If you want to know the truth, Lent was for the nominally committed.

[3 : 50] I mean, we would have Jesus 365 days a year. So, those who practice Lent, well, they were further along the scale than the Christmas and Easter Christian, but only by 38 days.

Come to us when Jesus meant more to you than giving up chocolate for 40 days. This kind of latent, ignorant, unconscious ambivalence.

Well, the personal note aside, I'm now an adult. Time to think for myself, and to recognize the value that the Christian church has placed upon Lent, that value cannot be denied.

Lent is a centuries-old aspect of the church's calendar. And Pastor Jackson and I thought that while neither of us were exposed to it much growing up, we would do well to acquaint ourselves and our congregation to it.

So, this year, all of the Sunday sermons up through Easter follow the liturgical readings for the year given to us. And it's my prayer that God will use this in my heart, in your heart, in our heart, that we would have full, soul engagement with the truths of the gospel culminating in Good Friday and Easter.

[5 : 23] So, let's begin. And let's begin at the beginning. How do you come to know what Lent means?

The word Lent. Before familiarizing myself with it, I would have guessed by definition and etymology that was something very serious.

Sober. Dour. Depressed. Deprived. Disciplined. Well, you might be surprised to learn that the word Lent comes from the medieval English word simply meaning spring.

Who would have thought Lent spring? For indeed, that was the season in which it is celebrated. What a wonderful reorientation of mine that Lent can be the time of spring.

In the simplest of terms, the season's duration lasts from Ash Wednesday to Maundy Thursday. Coming just over the horizon now.

[6 : 42] Minus, of course, the Sundays. Sunday was never to be a day of fasting or deprivation. It was a day of resurrection. And so you take the Sundays out and you add the days in between and the prescription is somewhere close to 40 days.

And the 40 days is symbolic and yet also borrowed from the rich imagery of the Scripture. So Moses himself is away.

for 40 days on the mountain. You might think of Israel and their 40 years in the wilderness. Preeminently, the 40 days refers in Lent to the reading of the day, the 40 days of Jesus in the desert and his temptation.

The characteristics of Lent are prayer, penance, self-denial, almost this long, conscious preparation for what God does in Christ come Easter.

in short, in short, if I were to define it, it is a season of preparation wherein there is an intentional cultivation of soul in readiness for Good Friday and Easter.

[8 : 13] That's the way I'd like you to approach it these 40 days. an intentional cultivation of soul in readiness for Good Friday and Easter. The two vignettes that we've been given today in Mark's Gospel for the first Sunday of Lent come from the time of Jesus' own preparation of soul to a period in his life where he cultivated and experienced things that made him ready for his work in the Gospel.

Take a look. Mark 1 and you'll need the text with you today. Two vignettes. The first can be found in verses 9 through 11.

Simply, the baptism in the wilderness by John. The second vignette follows and it's the content of verses 12 and 13 the temptation in the wilderness by Satan.

And notice, both are said by Mark to be under the guidance and the specific intention of the Spirit. The Spirit is involved in both.

Both at his baptism and at his almost throwing him out into the desert. These are the vignettes. The baptism by John, the temptation by Satan.

- [9 : 41] So let's look at the first vignette. The natural question should be, at least in this kind of series, is there anything here as early even as the prologue of Mark?
- This act of baptism that he would intend for us to begin thinking already of his death and resurrection.
- At first glance, you say, are you kidding me? I mean, we're only ten verses in. I mean, we're at the very beginning. He hasn't even gotten started yet.
- How could we already be hinting at things that allude to his death and resurrection? But that said, there are two things here said by Mark that would make me feel differently.
- Take your eyes off the event for a moment. Take your eyes off the baptism and place your eyes on the interpretation. Not the event, but the interpretation.
- [10 : 54] Two things said by Mark at the baptism or written by Mark that interpret the event for us. Let me take a look at the second interpretive verse first.
- Verse 11. And a voice came from heaven. You are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased. Take special note of the phrase beloved son.
- It was some years ago now that we were preaching through Jude which uses this term beloved for the address ease on more than one occasion.
- And I was fascinated with the term and wrote a note to our own New Testament scholar, Dr. Claret Rothschild and said, help me on the beloved.
- And she sent me a note indicating that the four references to Jude's audience as beloved might suggest a situation of persecution to which she then gave me the words of John Meyer.
- [12 : 04] Listen to this. Behind beloved in Mark 1.11 may lie the Hebrew Yahid. The Hebrew word strictly means only, only one.
- But in a context of family relationships when applied to a son, it may mean only beloved or the uniquely beloved one.
- In this sense, it is applied to Isaac in Genesis 22 on three occasions. And since Abraham did have other children by other women, notably Ishmael by Hagar, the sense here is that Isaac is the beloved one, the unique one.
- The sense of love contained in that word is underlined interestingly in the Septuagint in every instance where the term is used in the Hebrew text. It is used as an only or only beloved son or daughter who has died or who is destined to die.
- That's the only time it appears. Think it through. Isaac in Genesis 22. Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11.
- [13 : 23] Mourning for an only son in Amos 8 and in Jeremiah 6. The mysterious pierced one who is mourned as an only one in Zechariah 12.
10. Every instance of the term beloved, it is used with one who is destined for death. Here comes the voice from heaven at the baptism of Jesus.
- this is my beloved son. Already throwing into the mind of the reader the foreshadowing of death.
- In other words, Mark's use of beloved casts his entire prologue under the shadow of death.
- That's his intention. In fact, that's borne out in the other two instances that I've been able to find the use of the term in Mark.

[14 : 29] Turn over to Mark 9 and verse 7. You'll see this term beloved again at this point at the center of the gospel, the mount of transfiguration where Jesus had taken his closest ones to the mountain and was transformed before them and a cloud overshadowed them, verse 7, and a voice came out of the cloud, this is my beloved son.

But look immediately at what happens. He charges them to tell no one of what they had seen until the son of man had risen from the dead. And they began questioning themselves.

What does this rising from the dead mean? And he begins immediately to speak of Elijah who was to restore all things but that the son of man should suffer. That he should die.

The other instance of the term in Mark's gospel is in chapter 12 and in verse 6. Here of course Jesus is telling the parable of the tenants.

And in the midst of the parable beginning at verse 9 he says and he sent another and him they killed. And so with many others they beat and some they killed. He had still one other beloved son.

[15 : 51] Finally he sent him saying they will respect my son. But those tenants said to one another this is the heir come let us kill him each time beloved.

The foreshadowing of death. Think of it here then back to Mark 1. The text reads with the cross already looming.

The eternal son of God at this point in history mysteriously incarnate by the virgin Mary born of a woman into time space this world our world and into the waters interpretively meaning already moving toward death.

Jesus isn't just coming onto the scene here the language is throwing you forward to Good Friday.

He did this for you. He came for you. He came with the intention of purchasing a people for God.

[17 : 28] The voice calls him the beloved son. I've been interested to learn that Lent would direct the Christian's attention back not merely to Jesus' baptism but to their own.

And there is something here for us. For those of you who have been baptized. For baptism and waters are by nature acts of God's judgment.

Think of the flood. Think of the passing through the Red Sea, both the salvation and judgment. Think of the way Paul uses baptism in Romans 6, which indicates your union with Christ in death.

And think of the next 40 days or roughly thereabouts. for those of you who have been baptized into Christ Jesus, you have been united with him in his death.

And the question is, should we go on sinning that grace may abound? And the answer that Paul gives is no. On what grounds, Paul? On the grounds that you have been baptized into the waters of death.

[18 : 48] May these weeks, may those waters, be real. A real holding of you in faith. A determining by you to live by faith and to deprive yourself of gratuitous sin which despises in some sense the very waters of Christ.

Now, there is another moment in the first vignette that will help you prepare for Good Friday and Easter. Take a look at verse 10. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

Especially the phrase the heavens opening. A fascinating choice of terms. Literally opening as if they were being torn open from the word schizo.

You think of something that is torn by force being divided in two. That the heavens were by force ripped open.

all that separated a holy God from an unholy world. At the baptism of Jesus, there is a rending of the universal tent and cloth and the voice comes.

[20 : 32] Only one other time does he use that term in Mark. Take a look down the road at the narrative of the cross in chapter 15.

Jesus is on the cross. Verse 36, there is sour wine in play. Verse 37, he utters a loud cry and breathes his last.

And verse 38, the curtain of the temple was torn, same word, in two, from top to bottom. God.

What an irony. The book ends of Mark. On the front end of the gospel, the heavens are literally torn in two.

And a voice descends, this is my son. And at the close of the gospel, the pattern of that same heavenly distance with the curtain is torn and here a voice ascends, namely that of the centurion who says immediately, this was the son of God.

[21 : 53] What a gospel. God is announcing at the beginning that his son is coming to make satisfaction for sin and at the end the centurion willingly, unwillingly, wittingly, unwittingly, I don't know, I don't care.

He did say, this must have been the son of God. This is a unique death, what I have seen. I've watched hundreds of men die, and none died like this. Which for you and me suddenly then means there is access.

God has torn open that which has separated from us, and he did so at the baptism of Jesus, and Jesus has torn open that which separated us from God, and he did so on the cross, praise God.

The dividing wall has been torn down. You have the possibility of relationship with God through Christ. God sent his son under the water, put it this way, into the waters under the words of death and resurrection.

That brings new meaning, doesn't it, to the words we've been singing. Keep me near the cross. In the cross, in the cross, be my glory ever.

[23 : 22] Near the cross, O Lamb of God, bring its scenes before me. Help me walk from day to day with its shadow over me.

Even in his baptism, you are being ushered into the cross. All who are thirsty, all who are weak, come to the fountain.

Dip your heart in the stream of life. Let the pain and sorrow be washed away in the waves of his mercy as deep cries out to deep, come, Lord Jesus, come.

Come. what a wonderful gospel we have. What a wonderful season to prepare for it. Briefly, let me show you the second vignette.

What is the immediate consequence of sonship for Jesus? Fascinating. Mark chapter 1 verses 12 and 13.

[24 : 29] the spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness and he was in the wilderness 40 days being tempted by Satan and he was with the wild animals and the angels were ministering to him.

The first and immediate consequence of sonship for Jesus? A season of suffering and battle with the enemy. Sonship, wilderness, spirit, spirit, intention.

You know God? Please, God is pleased, off to the wilderness you go. Just the way it works in all the American pulpits, right? Come to know God, first act of sonship, off to the wilderness.

True for Jesus, according to the gospel of Mark. The baptism of Jesus by John is followed by the temptation of Jesus by Satan and that for 40 days.

From baptism to battle. Now, Mark's intention is very limited. We get nothing else here on the 40 days. You have to go to Matthew and other places. For Mark, all he wants you to know is that that's the way it works.

[25 : 52] And he was ministered to. He was protected. But for you and me and for the next 40 days, you might want to know a little bit more about the battle that takes place.

I think of going back to something like Matthew 4 in the coming week and reading that for yourself over and over. What were the temptations of Jesus? They really came down to three areas of life.

First, he said, hey, you're still hungry out here in 40 days, take this stone, make it into bread. In other words, there's an element of provide for yourself. Don't let God provide for you, you provide.

Or, in a sense, the lust of the flesh. Feed yourself. Jesus says, no, I won't do it. The second one, of course, is he takes them up on that high place and he says, throw yourself down.

God will provide for you, he'll protect you. That's pride, see, that's presumption, that's because you know God, you can do what you want and he's going to take care of you. The third one, of course, is the sin of power.

[26 : 57] He says, look at all this domain, fall on your knees to me and I'll give it to you. Those are the temptations of Jesus. Provision of the flesh, presumption of relationship, and power in the world.

Now, which ones are coming at you? My guess is the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the boastful pride of life are not new for you. They certainly were nothing new for Jesus.

This is the way it works. Think of that enigmatic phrase in Mark, he was out there with the wild beasts. Some have tried to take this to be something positive, you know, like, well, it's an indication that the lion and the lamb are now lying down together.

It could be, but I don't think so. The wild beasts, that's just a bad place to be. I was in Africa, made the biggest mistake of my life with Noah, walking through the hippo pond area, out of our car, in a game park, and the guy was talking in Swahili, we said, what did he say?

He said, well, he said we should wait for the guides before we go through, but I think we're okay. So we're out there 50 yards in the middle of this tall grass, all of a sudden we see a guide coming back. Guess what the guide has in his hand?

[28 : 29] A rifle, the size of, you know, the kill a hippo. And I'm like, that's why we were supposed to wait for the guide. Then we hear a hippo in the grass, and we'd walk between it and the water.

I told Noah, I said, Noah, they tell me that the hippo kills more people in Africa than any other animal. So you can't outrun it.

So we got to get back, we got to go right through the way we came, keep your eye on a tree. Your only way out is up a tree, which I'm sure Noah then thought, well, I'm going to beat you to it. Hey, I have never, this is true, I have never been so frightened in my life, as to take that 50 yard walk back through the high grass, hoping the hippo was not in a place where I was between her and her young, or her and her water, and I was never happier than when I got back in that car.

The wild beasts are not a good thing. He didn't say the lion and the lamb are dwelling together here. He said he's out there with the wild beasts, he's in a dangerous place, a destructive place.

Paul says, you know, I fought the beasts in Ephesus, and so will you. For the way of the sun is the way of the follower.

[29 : 52] You've come up out of the waters into sunship, your way in the world will be the wilderness, and dangers will be on every side.

Are you prepared for them? are you consciously remembering the war that needs to be waged against the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life?

For indeed, Jesus came to beat them all back for you. interesting final phrase, and the angels were ministering to him, almost a throwaway line.

Thank God. It reminds you of Elijah, doesn't it, where he sent the ravens to, God sent the ravens to make their way. I pray that in these next weeks to Easter, you will experience, that we all will, the unique ministry of the spirit, of his messengers, of his body, in ways that will spur our collective growth in him.

First week of Lent, may we together prepare our hearts to see him. Our heavenly father, we come to you this afternoon with these reminders now planted, and we are grateful for the season.

[31 : 45] And we ask that we would indeed live lives in a self-conscious way, remembering the glories of the cross, and waging war with the implements you have given to us.

In Christ's name, amen.