Lent I

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Preacher: Fr. Wade Miller

[0:00] The story of Israel's entrance into the promised land looms in the background to our gospel text this morning.

Israel had been freed from the tyranny of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. They had been saved through the parting of the Red Sea. They had wandered in the wilderness for some 40 years, testing the patience of Moses and often failing to trust the Lord.
And now they had a new leader, Joshua. And Joshua would lead them into the promised land as they would pass through the Jordan River.
Into that place where God would be with them, promising never to leave nor forsake them. But before they entered into this place of rest that was to be flowing with milk and honey, they were to adhere to the word of the Lord.
And they were to drive out the perverse and demonic people who practice the atrocities of child sacrifice and barbarism of the worst kind.
[1:20] And the people of Israel agreed. They agreed to forsake the rebellion of their wicked neighbors and to do all that the Lord had commanded them. And they affirmed their covenant with God.

We read in Joshua chapter 1 verse 16. So they answered Joshua saying, All that you command us, we will do. And wherever you send us, we will go.
Sadly, that promise to God was broken time and time and time again. Instead of driving out the wicked people, they intermarried with them.
And they began incorporating their pagan beliefs and practices. Instead of adhering to the word of the Lord, they started to rationalize sin.
And a whole generation of Israelites rose up. And we read in the beginning of Judges, everyone did what was right in his or her own eyes.
[2:24] Instead of putting God first, they gave themselves over to the worship of idols. And so the land that was to be a place of rest, a place flowing with milk and honey, that land became a place of terror, filled with destruction and slavery.

This morning we heard of our Lord's temptation by the devil here in Matthew chapter 4. But this story comes immediately after Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan.
Jesus came up out of the Jordan River, marking that now a new exodus was at hand. The kingdom of God had come to this earth.
And one greater than Moses or Joshua was now transforming creation from death to life, from destruction to now a new creation.
And Jesus would obey. He would fulfill the covenant of God. By fully adhering to the word of God.
[3:41] He was tempted after fasting 40 days in the wilderness, representing the 40 years of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness.

He was tempted by the devil to give in to the passions and to worship a false god, the devil himself. And all this was meant to deter him from his ultimate destination.
His journey to Jerusalem, where the incarnate God, the God who had become flesh, the God who was baptized, representing a new exodus, was at hand, would offer his own life upon the cross.
So that we might be liberated and saved from the slavery of sin and eternal death. Friends, you and I are living at a critical point in our lives.
As baptized Christians, we are called to choose whom we will serve. We have been baptized into Christ. We have left the bondage of sin and death.
[4:55] We have renounced the devil and all his ways. But before we enter into that final promised land of rest, we are called to adhere to the word of God.

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Not allowing ourselves to be sucked back into a life of sin and idolatry. We are called to come out from the wicked.
Not allowing ourselves to be brainwashed by the spirit of the age, which speaks language of affirmation and love, but is really demonic at its very core because it is filled with selfishness.
We are called to resist the temptation of the devil to feed upon our passions and our lusts. We are to resist the temptation of the idols of our age, materialism, or striving to gain acceptance from the vast majority of people here in our culture.
And we are to submit to God and to his word in all things, bringing everything into subjection under the lordship of Jesus Christ.
[6:13] That's our calling as baptized Christians. And this is what we are faced with as we begin Lent. This is what we are faced with every day of our lives.

Who will we serve? We can either cater to our own beliefs, which are formed by selfishness, or we can bow in humble adoration to our God and give ourselves to God.
Adhering to pure selfishness and self-centeredness, that is much easier in the present time.
Fasting, praying, and giving ourselves to the word of God, however, is what prepares us for eternity.
We are called to train, to discipline ourselves in the here and now. That's what Lent is all about.
So that we might enter into that great and final promised land of eternity, which is inhabited by the faithful minority throughout history who have done that very thing.
[7:30] Who have walked in faith, submitting themselves to the word of God. And we join them in giving praise and glory to God.

And we do this world without end. Our path has already been paved for us. And this path is a path of denying ourselves.
Not pampering to ourselves. Not catering to every passion. We are called to deny ourselves. It's a very un-American thing.
But it is the path of the cross where we now offer our souls and bodies to be a reasonable and holy sacrifice. And as our Lord's life ended upon Calvary, our life began with the new life that sprang from the empty tomb.
We receive the immortal, the immortal humanity that comes down from heaven and our Lord's divinity by the power of the Holy Spirit as we come feasting on Christ who is the bread of life and now training ourselves in the ways of this new life, this new exodus.
[8:56] And this new life is saturated with grace. Hope and love. The pain, the suffering, the ridicule we receive in this world is nothing, nothing compared to the incomparable riches and love of that final promised land where the faithful of God reign forever and ever.

Therefore, dear friends, as we begin Lent together, let us prepare to enter into that final rest by walking according to the word of God and seeking to live obedient lives to that word, following the way of our Savior, our Shepherd, Jesus Christ.
Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

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