

LENTEN BELOVEDNESS

2/21/21 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA

Lent 1 (B): Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-9; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

Do you ever watch short films? You know those four-to-five minute pieces usually produced by independent filmmakers? I never exactly plan to watch them, but a couple of times now I've picked something out on Netflix that sounds interesting; I sit down to watch it; and before I've even finished my first handful of popcorn, the credits are rolling.

Every time it happens, I click on "resume from the beginning" a few times, and then fast forward, and back again, to try and figure out what's happening, and, then, finally, I read the description more closely and see that, yes, indeed, this was another five-minute film.

The Gospel of Mark is a lot like one of those short films. You just get started, and it's over! If you're not paying attention, you'll miss three-quarters of the story. And today's story—"You are my beloved; with you I am well pleased"—is one you don't want to miss!

We are in lectionary year B, which means most of our Gospel readings—starting with Advent and continuing over the many months ahead—are from the Gospel of Mark. Mark is the shortest gospel and moves along with quite a clip. Even the language employed in Mark indicates the speed with which he wants to relay the information. In just 16 short chapters, for instance, the word "immediately" is used 17 times.

With that in mind, it's not surprising that this morning's reading from Mark moves us quickly from Jesus's baptism, immediately to his time in the wilderness, to him proclaiming the Good News in Galilee. Mark's Gospel has no time for extraneous information. He goes straight to the heart of the matter.

So, what we might absorb from this fast, threefold movement: 1) baptism to 2) temptation to 3) proclamation is that those are the three components of discipleship. 1) In baptism we are formally welcomed into God's family, which is founded in God's covenant or promise to us; 2) we go through daily trials and tribulations, which can turn our focus away from God; and, then, 3) when we repent and turn back to God, we're able to share the Good News of God's love, mercy and grace with others.

We often speak of the Lenten season as our "journey into the wilderness" or the desert. If we were inside the nave of the church, sand would have replaced the water of the baptismal font reminding us of our desert time. The desert is a vulnerable place; there's not much to hide behind; everything gets stripped away.

The wilderness, or desert of our souls, is where we have the opportunity to stop long enough to look Jesus straight in the eye and acknowledge our tendency to stray from God's promise. One author describes that moment as having two completely simultaneous actions. Looking into Jesus's eyes, we see the truth of our sins—our own straying from God—but at the same time, we see in those deeply compassionate eyes, the vastness of God's mercy and forgiveness.

That's the purpose of the wilderness—to give us the space to acknowledge our own brokenness and need for God's grace. It's like any kind of emotional healing—until we acknowledge our actual state of hurt, pain, despair, anger, etc., the healing process will be subverted. But as soon as we're honest about the ways we let ourselves get distracted from

God's love, and once we admit our need of God's mercy, then we can actually feel the peace of God's healing balm.

The temptations in our own lives are daily and multiple. Those temptations are the sin of forgetting others are also God's beloved; they are the sin of judging others without fully knowing their circumstances; they are the sin of putting success above serving God; and they are the sin of letting our desire for personal security overtake our commitment to equality...just to name a few.

In this morning's reading from Genesis, we're reminded that God will stop at nothing to get our attention. In that passage, God's promise is symbolized in the brilliantly multi-colored rainbow. What a grand gesture of love—to place a glorious bow of color in the sky, to wake us up and proclaim: "You are my beloved; with you I am well pleased!"

God promise is made in covenant. A covenant is an everlasting and unretractable promise. Ours is a God whose love is eternal and offers us the same abundance of life and love. Over and over, God's actions indicate that death—in any form—never has the final word.

As the Psalmist writes, "All the paths of the LORD are love and faithfulness." Out in the desert, we are given the space to see those paths more clearly. God's mercy and grace are everlasting, pointing us back to our own baptism, when God surely spoke the same words spoken to Jesus that day: "You are my beloved; with you I am well pleased."

That is the ultimate message of Lent and at the heart of Mark's fast-paced Gospel—that God loves us and is always waiting for us to return to God's grace-filled embrace. Yes, Lent is also a time when we journey along with Christ on the path to the cross, and that can be depressing at times, and can even make us feel a little ashamed, at some points, for humanity's part in his crucifixion, but ultimately, the journey is so that we might never forget that we belong to God.

Your life might seem like a racing short film right now, but slow...it...down; take time to absorb God' desert message: "You are my beloved; with you I am well pleased."

-AMEN

The Collect

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Genesis 9:8-17

God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make

between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

Psalm 25:1-9

- 1 To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul;
my God, I put my trust in you; *
let me not be humiliated,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.
- 2 Let none who look to you be put to shame; *
let the treacherous be disappointed in their schemes.
- 3 Show me your ways, O LORD, *
and teach me your paths.
- 4 Lead me in your truth and teach me, *
for you are the God of my salvation;
in you have I trusted all the day long.
- 5 Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love, *
for they are from everlasting.
- 6 Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions; *
remember me according to your love
and for the sake of your goodness, O LORD.
- 7 Gracious and upright is the LORD; *
therefore he teaches sinners in his way.
- 8 He guides the humble in doing right *
and teaches his way to the lowly.
- 9 All the paths of the LORD are love and faithfulness *
to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

1 Peter 3:18-22

Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the

building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you-- not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."