

Lent 1-February 18, 2024

Genesis 9:8-17, 1 Peter 3:18-22, Mark 1:9-15

“Baptized, Tempted, Saved

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you this day from God our Father and from his Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Prefigured. This is a word that is not used very often. Prefigured means an early indication of something. You can probably substitute the word “foreshadows” for prefigured when you use it in a sentence. It is important to keep in mind that when you use this word, it is only an indication of something. It could foreshadow something that is different. Back in late October, I did a pre-year-end tax appointment with my accountant to have him “prefigure” what our taxes might be for 2023. What was prefigured was only an indication of what our taxes will be. The tax bill is very unlikely to be the same as what was prefigured. The Old Testament is full of stories that give an indication or point to what will be the case in the New Testament. In fact, every story in the Old Testament prefigures the coming of Jesus Christ. These stories are only about Jesus who had not yet come down from heaven to earth. Then the stories of Jesus Christ in the New Testament are written and repeated about Jesus who has come near and so that you know what he has done for you.

We always turn to the story of the temptation of Jesus as the season of Lent begins. The main reason for this is found in verse 13 of the gospel reading for today. Here we learn that Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days, tempted by Satan. The 40 days that Jesus was tempted prefigure the 40 days of the season of Lent which we observe today. If you look at the Lenten Worship Schedule on page 7 of this week’s bulletin and count the days between Ash Wednesday and Easter, it would be more than 40. 46 days to be precise. But to make the “40” days in the season of Lent work out like the 40 days that Jesus was tempted, we don’t count the 6 Sundays that are in the season of Lent since Sundays are considered to be “little Easters”. In any event, we are in the season of Lent, a time spent in the wilderness of this world when you and I, like Jesus, will be tempted by Satan for 40 days.

If you remember hearing the story of the temptation of Jesus and feel like some details have been omitted today, it is not because we have chosen to leave out certain verses from Mark’s reporting of this event. Matthew and Luke include the specific temptations that Satan presented to Jesus. You may recall that Satan tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread. Satan next tempted Jesus to see if angels would protect him if he jumped off the pinnacle of the temple. And Satan’s final temptation was showing Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and telling him that they could all be his IF he would fall down and worship him. These specific temptations are often used as fodder for preaching sermons by some pastors that they feel will give you the ammunition you need to protect you from the temptations of Satan. Mark teaches us how to combat the lies of Satan as well, but he doesn’t use a formula to use depending on whether Satan is tempting us to eat something we shouldn’t or tempt us to do something that we know is wrong, but we want to do anyway.

Turning Satan away is not found in what you say to Satan. It is found in what Jesus has said to you. It wasn’t just Mark who taught us this. Both the Matthew and Luke stories of the temptation of Jesus begin in the same way that we heard Mark’s story began today.

All the stories of the temptation of Jesus were preceded with what Jesus did before he was sent out into the wilderness to be tempted. Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River. The second lesson for today from 1 Peter turns back the pages of scripture back to the story of Noah in Genesis when eight people were saved from the flood waters. This saving that happened in the water prefigures the salvation you receive

in the waters of baptism. Verse 21 which is on the cover of your bulletin usually doesn't make the front-page news in most churches. The story of Noah and his sons and their wives who were chosen by God to be saved from the flood prefigures, it points to your baptism. Baptism, water, and God's word saves you. These words appear in 1 Peter, and we know Peter is known for blurting out words from his mouth that Jesus often interrupts him from completing, but Jesus does not interrupt Peter when he declares this clear promise. Baptism now saves you.

Jesus was first baptized and then he was immediately thrown out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Not only was the devil attacking Jesus, but apparently wild animals also were seeking to harm Jesus. Mark doesn't record a single word that was exchanged between Satan and Jesus, but we know who won this battle. The winner was the only one who received a promise from his Father when he was baptized. Jesus. And after Jesus won the battle, we are told that he was waited on by the angels.

Mark also gives an interesting detail about Jesus' baptism that was prefigured all the way back from the creation story. On the second day of Creation, the Lord put a dome in the sky. It was to separate the waters that were above the dome from the waters that were below the dome. There was a barrier between heaven and earth. Another barrier was also described in the building of the tabernacle. It was described as a curtain that was hung to separate the people of God from where God spoke his word directly to the priests. These barriers that separated the people of God from God prefigured the day when the heavens were torn apart and the spirit of God descending like a dove on Jesus. This separation from God also prefigured the day when Jesus died on the cross and the curtain in the temple immediately was torn from top to bottom.

The details of the stories of Jesus baptism and temptations vary. But the order is always the same. Jesus was baptized. Jesus was tempted. Jesus was saved from the attacks from Satan.

Jesus' story now prefigures your story. The words of Peter were not his. They were words from Christ himself. They are not words that somehow got put into scripture by accident. They are the same words that end the gospel of Mark, "The one who believes and is baptized will be saved." Baptism and faith in Jesus are not separate steps toward salvation. There is no separation between faith and baptism. They coexist in faith. Titus declares the same truth. He (Jesus) saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth. What is the water of rebirth? It is Baptism.

There is however a difference between Jesus' 40 days of temptation in the wilderness and your 40 days of temptation during the season of Lent. Jesus did not fall for a single temptation from Satan. You will. And I'm sorry to bring you the bad news that your temptations from Satan will not end on Easter morning. Your 40 days of temptation will continue until you take your last breath on earth. And you will not only be tempted, but you will also fall to these temptations. Your failure to do what you don't want to do will never be overcome by your efforts. However the good news for you is that since you are baptized, Satan that he has no power over you. You have been chosen in baptism to be a Child of God and with that promise forever ringing in your ear you have nothing to fear. Your efforts to save yourself are just what Satan hopes and tempts you to try. Christ's promise that baptism saves you amid Satan's temptations is the little word that will subdue him. Through your baptism, Heaven has been torn wide open for you. Amen