

February 21, 2021 ~ First Sunday in Lent ~ Left home, got baptized, got tempted.

I speak to you in the name of our God of mercy. Amen.

When I was 7 years old, I received my first diary. It had a green leather cover with gold writing that said My Diary and it even had a lock with a little gold key. I loved that little diary. However, I didn't write very much in it at first. I was faithful though.

Every day I would write in cursive just 2 simple sentences.

Got up. Went to bed.

And the next day, *Got up. Went to bed.*

And the next day, *Got up. Went to bed.* And so on for months!

Surely something must have happened during the day! I must have gone to school, eaten meals, played with my friends. Surely at the age of 7, something happened....?

Mark the Evangelist, the author of the 2nd gospel, had short, concise and direct style of expressing the gospel of salvation of Jesus, kind of like a scientist or a mathematician. Mark wrote to be direct. He did not add any extra details.

In our gospel passage this morning from the 1st chapter of Mark's gospel, Mark's brevity is apparent.

Here are his 3 points about the life of Jesus:

Left home, got baptized, got tempted.

One half of a verse to leave home, 2 ½ verses to get baptized and 2 verses to be tempted.

If you blink, you will miss it.

Here is the passage from Mark 1:9-12

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 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. 11And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved;* with you I am well pleased.’

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

No details are given. No mention of how Satan tempted Jesus that we read about in Matthew and in Luke. However, only Mark mentions the wild beasts and we do not know if Jesus was at peace with the wild animals or if they were part of the frightening aspects of the wilderness. There is no mention by Mark of fasting but we do know that the angels served him.

The length of the temptation is important to pay attention to ~ 40 days! The 40 days is significant as the Hebrews wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. The flood lasted for 40 days and 40 nights (Genesis 8:6). Moses spent 40 days and 40 nights with God on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 34:28). The prophet Elijah fled for 40 days and 40 nights (1 Kings 19:8) to Mt. Horeb.

There are spiritual blessings that follow these tough experiences. God gave a new covenant with Noah. That is our Old Testament reading for today, the first Sunday in Lent.

I have set my bow (rainbow) in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Genesis 9:13

Moses received the 10 Commandments and God spoke to Elijah.

And the power of 40 days continues on after the resurrection. The risen Christ spent 40 days until he ascended into heaven teaching the good news of our salvation. And then we had the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost.

And what drove Jesus into the wilderness? It was the Spirit of God. That is why we let God drive us into our own Lenten wilderness. We let God guide and direct our spiritual disciplines.

What happens after Jesus ends his 40 days of temptation in the wilderness? He proclaims the good news of God. He asks us to “repent and believe in the good news.’ (Mark 1:15)

Jesus asks us to change our hearts and to change our lives. That sounds like a big order. How do we do that? We begin with strengthening ourselves during Lent by taking on Lenten disciplines such as fasting. You know the old saying, Lent *is spring training for Christians*.

Left home. Got baptized. Got tempted. But that is not the end of the story. That is just the beginning. Jesus is now strengthened for ministry, strengthened to proclaim the good news of God. So, we could say; *Left home. Got baptized. Got tempted. Proclaimed the good news of God.*

It has been a year and I am finding it hard to maintain the discipline of my virtual pilates classes. I try for twice a week but it isn't easy. And I am finding that I am not as strong as I used to be just a year ago. We can't store our physical health. We can't store our spiritual health.

Listen to what the spirit of God is saying to you as we begin Lent. It is still early days, just 5 days since Ash Wednesday. Is the Spirit of God driving you into the wilderness? Are you willing to go? Are you willing to submit to God? Change your heart? Change your life? Conquer your temptations once and for all?

Got up. Went to bed. Maybe that's not such a bad way to get through the wilderness after all.