

Mark 1:9-15
Feb. 21, 2021

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I love the temptation story in Mark, and not just because it's really short – only two verses long. Mark is a Gospel of few words. But, I love what it has to say that the others do not.

Matthew and Luke give us a whole lot more detail about with what Satan tempted Jesus. There are 11 verses about it in Matthew and 13 verses in Luke. John doesn't even bother telling the story, because he doesn't want Jesus to seem weak in any way, shape, or form.

But, the Synoptics are different. They tell us that after his baptism, Jesus was cast out into the wilderness and tempted for forty days. This is why we practice Lent for 40 days. We get tempted by chocolate or coffee for 40 days.

But, that's not the kind of temptation that Satan offers. Satan's only aim is to get us to think that God doesn't love us and that God is out to destroy us, which is a total lie. But that doesn't stop him from peddling it wherever he can, even with Jesus of all people!

So, if you do give into chocolate or whatever you may have given up for Lent, that's just a good reminder that even if you fail, God still loves you. There is no punishment for breaking the fast. The fast is a response to God and a will to grow closer to God.

So, when you eat the chocolate or just want to eat the chocolate, you turn to God in prayer – either for help or to admit you failed – but either way you are declaring you need a Savior. That's the whole point of Lent, so that when Jesus is crucified and resurrected we can fully celebrate that that he is our Savior! But, that's still 37 days away.

But, I digress. The reason I really love the temptation story in Mark is because Mark gives us one piece of information that all of the others leave out. Did you hear it?

In Mark, we hear that Jesus was in the wilderness with the wild beasts. Jesus was in the wilderness with the wild beasts who were not and could not be domesticated.

Animals who would not and could not be domesticated. He's not out there with Fluffy – he is out there with lions, and tigers, and bears. Oh my!

Now perhaps that might give us a fright. It may seem really dangerous. But, I love the icon we have for our bulletin today. Jesus is just hanging out in the wilderness and the animals are like – “Hey Jesus.” And Jesus is like, “Hey animals.” It's all very nice and serene.

This should take us straight back to the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve were walking around with all of the animals and God, and everyone was at peace with one another before the fall. Doo da doo da doo.

But whereas Adam and Eve fell into the serpent's trap, Jesus does not. Jesus, in the wilderness with the wild animals keeping him company, is tempted by the serpent, Satan, but he doesn't cave. Jesus is not Adam. Jesus has actually come to replace Adam and reset all that had happened before.

Adam was responsible for sin entering the world – that sin being thinking that we can be God, which separates us from God, because if we are God we have no need for God, and that's what got Adam, Eve, and all of the animals kicked out of the Garden of Eden.

Jesus comes to replace Adam. To heal the wound that was caused in the beginning. Jesus comes to restore the relationship all of creation – human and animal - had with God before the fall, back when all of creation lived together in harmony with God and one another.

So, Jesus is in the wilderness with the wild animals. And it's by no accident that today's Gospel reading is paired with Genesis and the part of Noah's story where God makes a covenant not only with Noah, but also with all of the animals – wild and domestic – that were on board the ark.

Adam and Eve got all of creation kicked out of the Garden, but God didn't give up on Creation. When God floods the earth to wipe out the wickedness that had caused so much damage, God doesn't leave God's beautiful creation to be destroyed. God saves it – domestic and wild. God doesn't give up on creation.

God actually makes a covenant with Noah and everyone, every creature, who was on the ark. God covenants with the animals, and Noah.

So, just as when Jesus met with Moses and Elijah on Mt. Tabor as a sign of the fulfilling of the Law and Prophets, so Jesus hanging with the animals in the wilderness is a sign of God's dedication to Creation – all of creation.

In Genesis 1:26, of the NRSV, we hear that God created human beings in God's image. But, the word "in" could actually be translated "as." We are created as God's image. For me, that is a significant difference.

Created "in" the image of God seems to get us into a whole lot of trouble. "In" the image of God, we can do whatever we want, because we are like God.

"As," however, has a totally different implication. "As" the image of God, we are to take on God's purpose for the world – to care for all that God created – to bring life not death. And that is what Jesus does, and that's what his followers are to do.

Adam was living "in" the image of God destroying relationships, but Jesus comes to live "as" the image of God to restore all relationships – human and animal alike.

So, I love that we hear in Mark that Jesus is with the wild animals in the wilderness, animals who have not become domesticated. They live apart from serving humans. They simply live, because God made them to live, and God loves them.

On Thursday, Percy landed on Mars. The Rover Perseverance, or Human Perseverance, was sent to the red planet more than 200 days ago, way back in July 2020. In the midst of Covid, Percy was sent to Mars to search for evidence of life. Percy will be collecting samples that will be sent back in 10 years and a small helicopter has also been deployed to scan the surface.

It's interesting that we are looking for life on other planets. I guess that means we value life.

Some of the researchers said they want to study Mars to know what happened and why it lost life so that it can help us protect our own planet. Others still see it as an escape hatch for when we destroy this planet and have to take off to find someplace else to live.

For me, those who want to learn how to keep life on this planet are living "as" God's image. They want to preserve life and care for the Earth.

Those who want to conquer other planets seem to be living “in” God’s image – or in the place of God, which is what got Adam and everyone else kicked out of the Garden, distancing us all from God.

Part of Lent is remembering that we are not God. The first commandment is – God is God and we are not. We destroy. God creates.

To live “as” the image of God is to promote life, to be life givers like Jesus. We destroyed him, but God brought him back to life, because God gives life. It’s not that we can do whatever we want and God will fix it. It’s just that with God there is only life, not death. Death goes against God’s very being.

So, how might we live in Lent, and beyond, “as” the body of Christ for the sake of the world?

How might we show the wild animals and the rest of creation that they also are God’s beloved? Because, after all, we are all made of the same stuff. Even Mars is made of the same stuff, and God took on that stuff in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. The one who leads us and saves us from our own self-interest.

If you made a cross from your Christmas tree or your greens, use it as a meditation tool for Lent. God took on flesh, the infinite became the finite, in Jesus, and in doing so he became one with all of creation. Not just us, but with all of Creation. The creation God creates, loves, and covenanted with way back at the time of Noah.

A couple of fasts that people are taking up this Lent are to reduce greenhouse gasses and plastic use. These are fasts that are beneficial to creation, and we are a part of creation, so they are beneficial to us as well.

When we live “as” God’s image, we honor the covenant God made with all of Creation, because we are all intertwined, especially since Jesus, in the flesh, as creation, ascended back into heaven. He took creation with him. Now that’s something to think about as we prepare ourselves for Easter.

After his baptism, Jesus was driven out into the wilderness where he hung out with the wild animals while satan tempted him to live “in” the image of God instead of “as” the image of God.

And the angels waited on him. I wonder if the wild animals were the angels. Angels are, after all, messengers from God. What better messengers to have than those who predated human beings and have experience all that people have done?

As we journey through Lent, may you remember that we are of one being with all of creation. Carl Sagan called it star dust, but God called it Earth dust. Either way, we are all in this together, because we are all of the same dust – Earth, plants, animals, people, Mars, and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

Thanks be to God. Amen.