

## **1 Peter 3:13-22**

<sup>13</sup>Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? <sup>14</sup>But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." <sup>15</sup>But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup>keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. <sup>17</sup>It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. <sup>18</sup>For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, <sup>19</sup>through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison <sup>20</sup>who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, <sup>21</sup>and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

## **Mark 1:9-15**

<sup>9</sup> At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

<sup>12</sup> At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, <sup>13</sup> and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

<sup>14</sup> After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup> "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

“Wading or Slogging Through Lent”

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I was thinking about how it was that Jesus prepared himself not only for his baptism, but overall for his ministry when I saw a cartoon video a friend shared about Jesus’ time in the wilderness, during which he was tempted. Given that most of us are worshipping via Zoom together, I would like to share with you Si Smith’s “40,” which imagines in 40 images what might have been Jesus’ experience, including the many days before he was tempted. For those of you who are listening in your cars or at home, you’ll be listening, as well, to a song by John McMillan, called “How He Loves Us.” The first image we will see, and nearly the only text included in the cartoon asks us to smile ironically, I think. “For my thirtieth birthday I gave myself some time away from it all.” In the upper left corner of each printed cartoon was the number of the days as they passed. . . . The images you can imagine as we see them here, are rendered in black and white, and include his prayers, nature’s beauty, the cave, the rain, the new growth and his refreshment . . . His fatigue and his depletion . . . Finally, his temptation, but not until he had been praying for a very long time—for days, for weeks.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5bfxGNMY9c>

It was with these images in my mind that I rewatched this video a couple of times in the past two weeks, considering as I did the letter from First Peter and also our lesson from Mark. The last line we hear is what makes a lot of people cringe these days, and so we may want to wonder together what it is that gives words like “repent” and “disobedience” a bad rap. I would like to suggest this morning that

each of us, no matter what we think of God, or of the nature of Jesus, whether divine, human, or somehow fully both, can learn a lot from him. Our having an utterly congruent understanding of who he was or what he claimed as truth isn't necessary for us to choose to follow his example, and on this first Sunday of Lent, we can learn a lot from taking a step toward discipleship.

What does the word mean? I'm sure a pupil or follower is how we usually think of the word. Considering the other words that stem from the same root we can broaden our understanding: "discipline : **PUNISHMENT**

*obsolete* : **INSTRUCTION** 3: a field of study 4: training that **corrects**, molds, or perfects the mental **faculties** or moral character

*5a* : control gained by **enforcing** obedience or order *b* : orderly or **prescribed** conduct or pattern of behavior *c* : **SELF-CONTROL**

*6*: a rule or system of rules **governing** conduct or activity" (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discipline>)

So, how can we use this Lent to mold the system or rules that govern our conduct and activity, in order to make us more obedient to the one whom we claim to follow?

How we attempt to draw closer to God might have to resemble Jesus' time in the wilderness more than we think. We may have to take some time away from it all, even if we do so within our own homes, in the middle of our usual activities. In the midst of the Covid pandemic, we have been feeling quite set apart, maybe even as though we are tested in a virtual and socially distanced wilderness. We can make this a very productive time of preparation, if we reframe how we regard the limitations, the relative restrictions that come with it. How to do so? We can

receive as blessing the “time away from it all” and enter into each activity prayerfully, for one, asking how our every action and our every word conforms to what we believe Jesus would have us say and do. That’s not an easy task, is it? Still, it is what our discipleship is meant to look like. If we look ahead and *use this* period of 40 days to practice well; to perform the tasks of our lives in such a way that we foster our discipleship, it may well be that we find it easier to continue in such a path after Easter, and even through any other period of social isolation.

One of the ways in which the Gospel of Mark stands out in comparison to the other three is in the sense of immediacy, the sense of urgency it conveys. This is certainly true in the passage for today, and perhaps is one way we can look at our own testing this Lent. If we are preparing ourselves to be disciples, even as members of the church throughout the ages have prepared themselves for baptism in the manner of Christ, we need to get on it! There are needs to be met, and they are not waiting for us to figure things out; not waiting until we move from hesitantly tiptoeing into our lives of faith. Rather, they are presenting themselves daily for our attendance.

Rick Morley, an Episcopal priest from NJ, writes about the urgency throughout Mark: “People are hurting, fearful, sick, hungry, thirsty, and mired in sin and death. Light and life needs unleashed on the world *immediately*. Now. Right now. Of course, that doesn’t preclude thoughtfulness, or prayerfulness, or discernment. It just means that we get around to doing that for which we were baptized (and for some of us, ordained) to do.”

So, we may want to ask ourselves how do we enter this Lent? Are we wading, the way children do when they first encounter the ocean? Leaping into its surf, giggling—running in and running back out, and eventually making their way more

deeply into the part that is calm? Or will we slog through it? What will our Christian discipleship look like this Lent, and always? And before we find ourselves imagining too well our slogging and struggling with all that may assail us, let's also remember the angels that attended Jesus. Let's remind each other that we are not alone in all we do. Let's be the presence of goodness and light for each other as we study and as we grow together.

Let us pray: Lord, please help us to wade into the waters of repentance this Lent, even as we would wade into your forgiveness. Help us to wade courageously into discipleship in your name, leaving behind the ways in which we slog fearfully, fretfully, wondering if we will ever be right. Remind us, dear Lord, that we are yours and that we are a forgiven people who may be emboldened by your love. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.