

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent

February 21, 2021

**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 of us 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 forever. Amen

**Lessons:** Genesis: 9:8-17

Psalm: 25:1-9

1 Peter: 3:18-22

Mark: 1:9-15

**The Sermon:** The Collect has an urgent call to God for help: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations. It goes on to imply that we are weak and by ourselves can't withstand the beating that is being heaped on us. But we know God can save us.

In the service: The Order for Compline there is a warning for us: Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith. (*1 Peter 5:8-9a*)

The devil, Satan, has been around for a long time. He was there as the evil influence that seduced Adam and Eve to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God had done his creation and made Adam the steward of all he had made. He gave Adam only one command, not to eat from the tree that was in the middle of the garden. This tree bore fruit that was the knowledge of good and evil.

When Adam and Eve ate this fruit, they injected sin into the world.

The book of Job (Job 1:6-7) tells us that God had called a meeting of the heavenly host and Satan was late to the meeting. When God asked where he had been, he said, "walking to and fro about the earth."

Satan had such an influence on mankind that he caused man to be disobedient to God's desires. This angered God so that he flooded the earth, destroying much of the creation he said was good, so that he could start all over. Why did he want to restart? He wanted to give man another chance.

God restarted creation with the righteous man Noah and his family. Noah had been obedient and lived as God wished man to live. So, because of Noah, God decided to restart, rebuild instead of totally destroying his creation.

After the flood had subsided God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth (*Genesis 9:1-12*). God then made a sacred promise to Noah, a covenant that he would never again destroy the earth.

Did man become obedient at this point? Did he live and behave in a way that was pleasing to God? No, he did not. Man kept on sinning and being disobedient.

Today's Epistle of 1 Peter tells us that God let his Son Christ suffer for our sins to redeem us, the righteous and the unrighteous, and to bring us to God. God sent Jesus into the world not to condemn it but to save it. In that popular Bible verse John 3:16 it tells us that God so loved the world that he sent his only Son so that those who believe in him would have eternal life.

Eternal life? God's continual presence.

In today's Gospel we encounter Jesus just as he is about to begin his ministry and do the work of his Father. We meet him as he is being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. As he comes up from under the water, the Holy Spirit descends and lands on him like a dove and the voice of God speaks, "This is my Son, the beloved, in him I am well pleased."

Jesus then goes into the wilderness. Satan goes with him. This is a time of discernment for Jesus. He fasts and prays. He is there agonizing and being tempted by Satan for 40 days and 40 nights.

He emerges from the wilderness having refused and denied Satan a victory. He is now set to fulfill the proclamation of the prophets that he will be God's anointed One. The Good Shepherd, The Savior of the World the one who will redeem us and take our sins away.

In this season of Lent, we commemorate the suffering Jesus underwent as he was struggling against Satan in the wilderness and Holy Week as he is preparing to die on the cross and to be resurrected.

For us this is a time of prayer, denial, penitence and a time to look deep within ourselves. I often say this is the one church season that is all about us and our relationship with God.

To commemorate the suffering of Christ, what are we willing to change, give up, do different? Will we do this from Ash Wednesday to Easter? Lent is really more than 40 days; we don't count the Sundays in Lent. Normally on Sunday's we are in church celebrating them as mini-resurrection days.

Will you make a sacred promise, during this time, and keep it?

Let me remind you that Satan accompanies you any time and any place that you allow him.

May you resist the assault of many temptations especially during this Lent. Amen.

Rev. Lionel Starkes