

Christ with the Wild Animals

Mark 1:9-15

First Sunday in Lent

February 21, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, our Gospel Reading, including these words, “And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Before we get into our text for today, let’s take a step back and think a bit thematically about the church year and how, if we understand it rightly, we might better appreciate today’s text:

When the Church Year begins in Advent and moves through Christmas and Epiphany, all of our focus and attention is on Christ Jesus – his birth, his childhood, his being made known to the nations. But then we hit Ash Wednesday and the call to repentance, and it seems we mistakenly turn very inward in our meditation of Lent. “Mistakenly” not because it’s wrong to meditate upon and wrestle with your own baptismal life, but I say “mistakenly” because such a turn tends to take the emphasis off of Jesus’ earthly life, where the emphasis ought remain as the Church Year progresses us toward Holy Week, Easter, his Ascension, and His giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. There’s plenty of time during the Season of Growth, those long summer months between Pentecost and the Sunday of the Fulfillment to focus on the Christian life and faith’s dependency on

Jesus. But, from Advent to Pentecost, the Sunday focus (even if midweek themes are on the Christian life) Sunday's focus is on the earthly life and mission of this long-promised Messiah and what He accomplished for us by entering human history and substituting his righteousness for our unrighteousness and sacrificing his life for our life.

Now, look at Mark's account of the Temptation of Christ in the wilderness, and Mark's account makes perfectly clear that the focus is all on Jesus the substitute, Jesus the Messiah, and not merely Jesus an example. What do I mean by that?

Matthew's account and Luke's account both spend a lot of time on the individual temptations the devil hurls at Jesus. Their texts give us opportunity to meditate upon how similar Jesus' temptation is to Eve's and thus (by our own application of the text) how similar his temptation is to ours. And, further noticing that this temptation starts on the heels of his baptism, it's very understandable (and not wrong at all, but very faithful) to use those texts to teach how we might learn to wrestle with temptation in the same way Jesus does. But all of that can be focused on and learned from Matthew's and Luke's accounts.

But that's *not* the focus of Mark's account. Mark's account spends an entire **one** verse on Jesus' temptation – just verse 13! – which says, “He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were

ministering to him.” And that’s *all* Mark says about this important event by which Jesus shows that the Christ must not only die for sins, but must first live the righteousness of perfect obedience the sinner is supposed to, but unable to, live.

And, perhaps that great difference between Jesus the substitute and those sinners for which he steps in... perhaps that is hinted at in that peculiar phrase, “he was with the wild animals.” Only Mark’s account even mentions these “wild animals,” but it paints a very graphic picture of temptation in the wilderness among the dangers of not just the **devil** (Satan is mentioned in the previous sentence), but also the dangers of the **world** and our sinful **flesh**.

Indeed, the world (not just its wilderness, but its most enlightened societies) is full of “wild animals.” Is that not the conduct we see all around us, animalistic behavior our society expects us to celebrate and worship? St Paul describes it that way when he says that, even as the pagan world gorged themselves in the lusts of their flesh, such fleshly living was testified to by their fashioning of idols made in the image of birds and animals, and they worshiped creatures rather than the Creator.

Is our society any different? - animalistic: this widespread depraved lust for sex in any form with any willing participant in any time and place as the supposed defining truth of life’s experience; the championed “inalienable right” to attack our children in the womb, leave defenseless those having survived abortion... the

equally horrific disregard for our elderly's care (how dreadful that our society puts as much effort into humanely caring for dogs as it does in caring for humans with supposed "quality of life" issues!) And what of the animalistic behavior that devours like wolves the consumables of society, or grotesquely mutilates the body to make it look and feel more like the image etched in the sin-sick mind (like a dog that chews off its leg when caught in a bear trap)? Then there's the animalistic survival-of-the-fittest mentality that justifies violence in our city streets, and the sadistic glamourizing of it on our televisions... and there's the unassuageable thirst for power among our elites, to ensure all the sheeple live not in freedom but in fear, as any subservient animal, any runt of the litter, would do in falling in line with the undisputed leader of the pack.... It's all animalistic behavior.

But, because our soft ears, always so worried about language that might offend, might be unwilling to consider our society's animalism, then let us coin another term: If you aren't willing to believe that the nations of the world think and act as animals, at least concede that the children of Adam think and act as "*Adam-als*."

Adam, who – in the beginning was made in the perfection of the image and likeness of God – that same Adam chose the path of sin, so that sin entered the world and death through sin, so that all sons of Adam inherit that Adamism and most willingly worship and celebrate it because, they argue, it is *natural*. Yes, it *is* natural,

natural according to the Fall, as natural as animals' undomesticated instincts, as natural as being born not in the likeness and image of God, but in the likeness and image of Adam.

To be a son of Adam is to be less than perfectly human, for to be 'perfectly human' is to be a *perfect* human and one with God, just as He created and intended it. But, that's not the children of Adam... not by sinful nature. For the world, that which is "natural" is a product of fallen Adam and thus, the world is full *not* of "children of God," but of "Adamals."

And that's why (though there *are* parallels) the temptation of Christ cannot be called identical to our own temptation wrestling. For *you and I of our own righteousness* are just as much "Adamals" as the rest of society. You and I are just as much *by nature children of wrath* (Paul says). You and I are just as much products of the Fall, and our natural inclination is to delight in being "Adamals." That's who we are... which is why God must say in the fallen Garden, "Woman, your desire shall be for your husband" ...because what animal engages in marriage? The animals just know sex and mating! Thus, the "Adamal" must be reminded that she was created for a marriage estate, not just for sexual desire. Likewise, God says to the *male* Adamal, "You will have difficulty having dominion over the earth, and you shall return to the dust." And isn't that the sad life of animalistic behavior?... an instinct to be 'king of the forest' until

being destroyed by a predator higher on the food chain and then simply returning to the dust.

Yes, this is who *we* are, conceived as children of Adam. This is what the Fall has left us to be; this is how we crave to live; this is the Adamalism we know and worship... until God sends the Christ he promised way back in the Garden, the Christ who is not *of* Adam, not an Adamal, but is the express icon and image of the Father and conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. And that Christ comes and substitutes himself for the condemning death we deserve, and then in resurrection glory, bestows the riches of his saving death upon us and claims us as his own as his Holy Spirit gives you a new birth in Christ (a *Christ-ian!*). Notice, the gospel is not to *improve* the Adamal; the gospel is to destroy the Adamal, while gracing us with the New Man of the new creation.

And, to do all that, to bring the Gospel out of theory and into flesh-and-blood reality, Jesus comes preaching, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

This is wonderful Gospel! “The time is fulfilled,” he says. Fulfilled for what?: fulfilled for a utopia to subdue our animalistic wild kingdoms? No. ... fulfilled for us to *evolve* out of Adamals into perfect humans by our increased effort and moral improvement? No. Rather, the time is fulfilled because the Messiah God promised from the Garden of Eden and waited for ever since, *his* time has finally

come. *He* has come. St Paul says, “[We] were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world (sounds like Adamalism). But (St Paul says), when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law.” There’s the mission of the Messiah and *now* (Jesus says in our text) now that time has come. Now that mission is here.

And with the coming Christ is also the next phrase, “The kingdom of God is at hand.” He brings life with Him. He brings God’s reign with Him. He brings God’s grace and compassion and lovingkindness and new creation with him. No longer are we to live in the wildness of the Adamal Kingdom; we are now – by the blood of the righteous Christ – to be brought out of that wild kingdom and into the kingdom of God. Or, as St Paul says it, that in the fullness of time, Jesus came “to redeem those under the law, *that we might receive adoption as sons.*” That is his Gospel to us – the good news for us. That is why he subjected himself to his own Law to live righteously on our behalf; it’s what He gave His substitutionary life and sacrificial death to secure... because He knew that no mere assistance would help us attain it; no mere teaching or aid or life-coaching would help us acquire it. No, he knows that we are Adamals who by our own strength have nothing righteous within us.

And thus, he does not come preaching, “Do like me” or “Follow my example” or “I overcame my temptation; you overcome

yours!” Instead, knowing our Adamalism, he preaches, “Repent, and believe in the Gospel.”

“Repent and believe in the Gospel.” – Repent because you do not live perfectly and resist temptation with the perfection of Christ as you ought; repent because your sin means more than a mere imperfect moralism, it means the creeping rot of spiritual death is still among you and ready to devour you and worship Adamalism and destroy faith.

So, repent... turn from such things, and take heart that these dangers need not define you, for you are granted by Christ to “Believe in the Gospel.” Repent and *believe in the gospel* – because therein is the message of your salvation, the hope of your deliverance to true humanity in the new creation. And, where that gospel of Christ Jesus is the hope of your salvation, then you wrestle against sin *not* as if to achieve some moral platitude by which God should be pleased (you don’t resist temptation because “that’s what good Christians do”), rather you wrestle against temptation and avoid sin because – if left unchecked – that sin would envelop you and drag you away from your Savior and from the new creation.

Consider that more carefully: When you no longer believe your sin is dangerous, you no longer believe you need a Savior from sin; and, when you no longer believe you need a Savior from sin, you no longer repent and desire to be freed from your sin; and when you no longer desire to be freed from your sin, you become Adamalistic

and before you're aware of it, faith has died; and you idolize your enslavement to such Adamalism and its lying promises.

That's why the most dangerous thing for you right now, friends, is the threat of what is coming when the pandemic's "all clear" is given and everyone is encouraged to return to normal. Dear Christian, God has called us to repentance precisely because **our "normal" had become indifferent to sin**, had become enamored with and grown numb to the dangers of living in our society's Adamalism. Thus, your greatest danger is the notion of returning to *that* normal... No longer can there be "no time for the Word of God because I have 5 hours of DVR recordings awaiting me." No longer can there be higher priorities than the Divine Service. No longer can there be a life of greed and gluttonous unfettered consumerism. No longer can there be a life of bending the knee to society's intellectual dishonesty and pretending that it's loving to call falsehood "truth." No longer can there be among Christians a subtle divisive idolatry of political agendas that worship the image of animals 'elephant and donkey' with greater fervor than the mutual Christian reliance on the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. No longer can there be a Church of Christ that reinterprets any verse of Christ's Word to lessen social pressure and make the Scriptures more loved by the world: **such things are Adamalism...**

... but **you** are no longer Adamals. In the fullness of time the Christ came and brought his righteousness to the cross and brought

you to be baptized into that sacrificial death, so that you are now recipient of the adoption of sons, you are now made new, you are now a New Man (Christ-ian!)... you belong *not* to the debase fallen nature of Adam, you now belong to the true humanity of Christ Jesus...

Jesus... whose righteousness is our substitute, whose death is our atonement, whose baptismal adoption is our new identity, whose doctrine is our life, whose declaration of forgiveness is our freedom, whose Holy Supper is our medicine of immortality, whose resurrection is our inheritance, whose Gospel is our certain hope.

Simply put: "Repent and believe in the gospel."

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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