

Lent 1 (B)
Pastor Ed Harkey

Mark 1:12-13
TLC, Keene, NH

When We Fall

“The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 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.”

Introduction

A number of years ago, the news reported the story of a drunk-driver who killed an 18-year-old girl. His sentence was three-year's probation and a year of community service. But the judge made one more stipulation – the perpetrator was to send a check in the amount of \$1 (made out to the victim), to be sent to the family every Friday for 18 years.

At times he failed to make the payment – “It hurts too much,” he said.

The parents, however, were not swayed: “We want him to remember. We don't want him to accept it – and simply get on with his life.” For them, it was about accountability, and to make the young man pay for what he had done.

Main Thought: As children of our first parents, we don't get a free pass on sin.

Even as we are baptized into Christ and into His death and resurrection, temptation is sure to come, as also the “fall.” However, in Christ, we fall not so much *from* God's grace, as *into* it, as Jesus our Champion faced sin head-on, defeating it, and so granting forgiveness and life to all who believe.

The FALLEN FIND FORGIVENESS in Jesus, who, though He did not FALL, has FORGIVEN and FREED us all.

Amen.

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EVEN THE BEST OF US DO

With His sandals still dripping from the water of His Baptism, Jesus is hurled into the wilderness. With very few details, Mark simply sets about to retrace the steps of Israel's history, to rewrite her story ... thus recasting the story of us all.

(Saunders, *Feasting on the Word (B)*, 2:49) Where each and every soul, from Adam and Eve onward, have not only faced temptation, but have fallen.

Take Abraham (our first reading notwithstanding) ... about as faithful to the Word of the Lord as any human could be (Genesis 22:1-18), even to the point of sacrificing his only son ... at critical times in his life falters and fails.

Or David, the greatest of Israel's kings – the one by whom all other kings will be measured ... even as worship-centered as he was, he had plenty of foibles of his own, accompanied with the most dreadful of consequences.

And then ... there is Jesus!

12 The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.

Few in fact, Mark sets up a contrast and comparison with the Old Testament. Where, in *contrast* to Adam, who was tempted in Paradise, the 2nd Adam (Jesus) is tempted in a desert ... In *comparison* with Israelites, who wandered 40 years in the wilderness as punishment for their rebellion, Jesus was 40 days in the wilderness. Yet, unlike Adam and Israel, however, Jesus remains faithful to His Father, and in so doing, secures salvation for all. (Adapted from Bird, *CPR*, 13:2, 10)

“[Yes] we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15)

Jesus, our Champion is the One – the only One – who gets a pass, the One to whom we turn when we ourselves sin; and we will ... we do. None are exempt.

In fact, spend some time this week reflecting on one or more of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20, or in the *Small Catechism*¹). Ponder them. Pray them through, examining your life in light of each of them. Where, if you're like me, you rarely make it past the 1st – “*You shall have no other gods before me.*” Here, with “fear, love and trust” of so many things *other* than God, we are stopped in our tracks, for fear of going further.

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...” (Romans 3:23)

WHAT WE DO WHEN WE DO

¹ A copy of which is found in our hymnal (*Lutheran Service Book*, 321-322)

But then, a gracious opportunity: God's gift of Confession & Absolution (or forgiveness) ... a gift because instead of trying to hide our sin or mask it, confession faces who we are, and what we have done, unclogging the gutter, as it were, and allowing the healing rain of God's forgiveness to flow.

"What is Confession?" the *Catechism* inquires. "First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the Pastor (or another Christian sister or brother) as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven."

Yes, what do we do with our sin? Our guilt? Our shame? Our failures?

✚ Take it to the cross in repentance – that daily return to our Baptism ... burying the worst, and stepping out of the water redeemed, renewed, restored.

*"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. **But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.**"* (1 John 2:1)

This is what confessing our sin brings us to ... this is what the season of Lent brings us to – namely, to Jesus, and to the forgiveness and grace that freely flow with the blood and water from His pierced side. Repent, yes. But more, believe that as Jesus' prayed "*Father, forgive them*" that prayer is answered in the affirmative. Your sin and mine are cast "*as far as the east is from the west.*" (Psalm 103:12)

Wherein, the second thing to do when we fall – though forgiveness is all Jesus:

✚ Return to who – and whose – you are – who Jesus claimed you to be in the waters of your own Baptism.

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized ("that public act of commitment to the way of God that John had been preparing"²) *by John in the Jordan. 10 And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open³ and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."*

Out of the Father's abundant grace, and in response to Him, and through Him, are we not also sons and daughters of God?

² Saunders, *Feasting on the Word* (B), 2:4545

³ The only other use of this verb is when the curtain of the temple was torn in two (Mark 15:38)

As we have been given a name, an identity, a worth and dignity, in this blessed call of Christ, are we, too, not rooted and grounded with all the saints in the eternal, unconditional, unalterable being and love of God?

In also hearing the Father's voice, "anchoring our ... identity, and worth eternally in God, do we not also hear the challenge to *believe* it, to *live* it, and to *declare* it" to be so for every man, woman and child?" (Hunter, *Feasting on the Word (B)*, 2:48)

Wherein, once being brought to repentance and to this joyous return to God ...

✚ Be renewed to take up the fight.

Like Jesus, "calling all angels," take to the Savior's Word of restoration and life.

"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4)

There is no surer weapon to ensure victory, to accompany you in the fray. Satan would separate you from this life-saving means, especially when you fall. He would cause you to doubt the very promises this Word contains. Doubt it not. His Word is sure. Draw near to it and to the throne of His grace.

The way of salvation has been forged. The curtain is torn. The door to His house is open. His Table of grace – laden with His gifts – awaits. As for those times when you desire to personally hear that Word, make an appointment. I'll gladly hear your confession, and speak His life-giving Word of forgiveness to you.

Where, in the end ...

CONSIDER IT ... DONE!

15 "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

"Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:15-16)

For what has Jesus done for you? He has done for you what you could not do. The "tempter whom you could never defeat on your own – Christ has defeated. The new beginning that you could never create – Jesus has created for you." (Bird, 12)

This is the essence of the Gospel: freedom from sin's judgment ... freedom to pursue God's call as we are now empowered by His forgiveness and grace – forgiven, to forgive!

Conclusion

In the midst of Jesus' temptation, Mark alone makes this curious observation:

And Jesus was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

To be sure, as Jesus once said His children are sent forth as *"lambs among wolves"* (Luke 10:3); and as if life in this world were not perilous enough, our adversary the devil *"prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour"* (1 Peter 5:8).

But Jesus has defeated the beast, and the accusing voice within. Yes, we have an advocate with Father, a greater Lion – whose victory is won.

So that "when you fall prey to the temptations of Satan, flee to the One who defeated Satan. ... As in Adam you died in sin, so in the obedient Christ you live. Repent and return to Him. ... He will receive and embrace you as His own. He who was tempted for you is never tempted to turn you away. His baptism is your Baptism; His conquering of sin [death and hell] is your conquering of sin [death and hell]; His crucifixion ... resurrection ... ascension ... yours! What belongs to the head, belongs to the body, and you *are* the body of Christ." (Bird, 12) From whom nothing – not even sin - can separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

Wherein ... "this is most certainly true":

The FALLEN do FIND FORGIVENESS in Jesus, who, though He did not FALL, has FORGIVEN and FREED us all.

"And if the Son has set you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:36)

Amen.

[Friday E-mail:] A number of years ago around this time of year (February 19), one of our nephews took his own life. He was just 16! Where, admittedly it's a grief that never goes away, one, perhaps, that you, too have known ... a grief that raises more questions than answers ... a grief that still stings every now and again ... a grief that can never fully grasp what leads some to exchange hope for the lie of Satan who says "I've got a better way." If I'm honest, I still can hardly believe it.

And then ... **LENT!** A season that bids us walk that bitter journey to the cross ... a season that ends with a cry of dereliction ("*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*") and the slamming shut of a tomb! There are already far too many tombs in my opinion ... those stone-faced reminders that all is not well, that something is sorely broken in our world, and that one day, I too will be its victim.

Where, the answer to whether we will make it through, or ever celebrate again finds its terminus in the season of Lent, where along the way, God graces us with a few signposts of hope:

CONFESSION & GOD'S WORD OF FORGIVENESS: CORPORATE OR PRIVATE

Where, after the pruning – of sin being cut away – we come to know God's love full blast. Here, no sin is too great to exhaust the all-encompassing love of God.

So also the LORD'S SUPPER

Where, week after week, we are invited to the Feast, to receive the Lord's gifts, and then, "go in peace." To be His guest, allowing Him to meet us where we are.

Then, there is DAILY - PRAYER

Where, either on a walk, or holed up in a corner of your house, we get to talk our heavenly Father. Where, in so doing, we remain connected to the Vine, our true source of life and strength.

Finally, there is GOD'S WORD

Yes, blessed are we if knowing where to find refuge. Where, only in Christ (the heart of that Word) may we fly to Him with assurance that He will not drive us away, but He will accept and welcome us – fear, anxiety, joy and all!

Confession and Forgiveness, the Lord's Supper, talking to the Father, taking refuge in His Word. A few of the Lord's sign-posts ... each pointing us to this glorious truth: All for hope, the Lord also does it all ... *for you*. SYOS