

# “The Cross and Grave”

Mark 1:9-15

If the Gospel reading sounds familiar, it should be. The first part (verses 9-11) were part of our Gospel reading from the Baptism of our Lord, the First Sunday after Epiphany. And the last two verses this week were the beginning verses read three weeks ago. This time of year we do a lot of jumping around in our scheduled readings. Last week, the Gospel was from Mark chapter 9. Now, we are back in chapter 1.

Why are we jumping around in the text rather than just reading it straight through? We have shifted gears and changed seasons. We left the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9), and we are beginning our Lenten journey with Jesus now heading toward Jerusalem. For centuries, the church has spent these 40 days focusing on the suffering of Christ for the sin of the world. Sin must be paid for.

After our Lord revealed His glory to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, He fixed His eyes on Jerusalem – on the cross and the grave. The wages of sin is death. The price for sin must be paid. Thanks be to God that He did not lay that burden upon our shoulders.

The Lenten Season is all about the cross and the grave. On Ash Wednesday, we were reminded that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. Jesus came for one purpose – He came to defeat sin and death. This dust will rise again and be joined with our spirit for all eternity. That is our great hope. That is why Jesus went to the cross and the grave.

It is the cross and grave which brought this victory. However, the journey to that cross began even before the Transfiguration of our Lord. For the cross to be the final altar for the final lamb of sacrifice, the sacrifice had to be worthy of covering all the sin of Adam and His children. There had to be a new Adam – a perfect Adam. God had to become man. He had to endure all the weaknesses and temptations that we endure, yet remain free from sin.

God enters the world as the child of Mary, and we celebrate. The child of Mary is born so that the man He becomes can die. That is the one purpose for which He came.

At His Baptism, we see the weight of the whole world, all of our sin and guilt placed upon Him – and God the Father celebrates. A voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.” And immediately, the Spirit of God drove Him out into the wilderness. Jesus is compelled, driven by the Spirit to go out to the place where only jackals and demons dwell.

He must be tempted in every way, just as we are, yet be without sin. He allows Himself to be physically weakened beyond anything you or I have ever endured. And He deals with Satan. I love the way Mark tells Peter's account of the life of Christ.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus is not the smiling Jesus we love to see in paintings or Sunday School coloring pages. Jesus is focused and driven – with one singular goal. He came for one reason. There is no Good News, there is no Gospel unless He is the perfect sacrifice. He must be the “lamb without blemish.” There is no Gospel unless He becomes sin for us. There is no Gospel unless He dies. There is no Gospel unless He rises from the dead. And there is no Good News for you unless you hear this Good News – and repent and believe in the Gospel. Mark makes it clear that the Gospel is not something you can understand before you believe. Faith comes first. And you must have the faith of a little child. Repent and believe – even though what we hear surpasses all human understanding. The 40 days of Lent is a hard journey. In the end, there is Good News.

Mark's Gospel repeatedly points you to the end. But in that “end” is the death of the Son of God. It was the only way to pay for your sin. Christmas is about the upcoming death of the child of Mary. Jesus is baptized, not to be washed of His sins, but to take on your sins so that He can carry them to the cross and

grave. Immediately, He carries that burden (He is driven by the Spirit of God Himself) out to confront Satan.

Then, after John the Baptist (who had been preaching “Repent! For the kingdom of God is at hand) is arrested (and has his head chopped off by Herod – who is the ruler of Galilee), Jesus goes to Galilee. We talked about this three weeks ago, when this was also our Gospel reading. Jesus goes to Galilee and preaches “Repent! The kingdom of God is at hand! Repent and believe the Gospel!

Jesus came into the world to die. He was not going to shrink back and play it safe. He is in control of the situation. There will come a day when Jesus will stand trial before Herod. And on that day Jesus will go to the cross and the grave. But the time and day on which Jesus goes to the cross would be determined by Jesus. “No one takes My life from Me,” He will say. “I give it up of My own accord.”

It was for this purpose that He came. He came to die. Everything that He does will lead Him to the cross and the grave. This is the Gospel. The guilt of your sin has been paid for. The blood on the cross has covered your sin. There is no Gospel without the cross and the grave.

What Jesus preached is what His church still preaches: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the Gospel. Amen.