

March 01, 2009
Lent 1

Pastor Russell Lackey

www.reflutheran.org

Mark 1:12-13

"Wait and see what Jesus does with the place"

At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert,¹³ and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

"At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert" (Mark 1:12). It is amazing the difference a verse makes. In verse 11, we read of God tearing open the heavens and saying to Jesus, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (1:11). Now one verse later, we hear the words, "At once (before the water can dry from his head) the Spirit sent him (drove him) out into the desert (wilderness). Talk about a contrast. Within an instant, Jesus goes from hearing the words, "I love you" to being cast out into the wilderness.

The wilderness is a place of sin. It was in the wilderness that Israel broke the covenant with God. The wilderness is a place of loneliness. Both Moses and Elijah spent forty days alone in the wilderness. The wilderness is a place of death. One entire generation of Israelites died in the wilderness. The wilderness has little water, food, and life.

Satan is in the wilderness. Filled with his lies Satan is always ready to offer poison water to those who thirst. It says he tempted Jesus forty days. We know three of the temptations. I wonder what the others looked like. Did the devil say to Jesus, "If you really are the beloved Son of God, then why did God cast you out into this forsaken place?" Satan is a filthy beast.

Speaking of beasts, it says Jesus was "with the wild beasts." You have been to the desert. You know what kind of animals are out there: venomous serpents, poisonous spiders, scary animals all competing against each other to survive. Jesus was with these wild beasts.

The wilderness is a hard place. This is hardly the place for the beloved Son of God!

In many ways, the life of faith looks like this. In the waters of Holy Baptism, God declares us "Keepers!" But then, almost immediately, we are driven out into the wilderness. Our lives and vocations are filled with trials and temptations. The devil is there challenging us at every turn causing us to question God's love. The wild beasts of illness, finances, and addictions surround us. It appears that we are not "kept at all"

Just look at the news. Things are wrong with the world. Things are wrong with the news.

Even Christians suffer. Pastor and teacher Stephen Brown tells about a time in his life when he was speaking at a conference. He learned that a hurricane was heading toward his home in Miami. He began to pray. He prayed that the hurricane would not hit his home. It did. He prayed that he would not lose his stuff. He lost it all. He prayed for the right contractor. The contractor stole \$60,000 and put

a \$15,000 lien on the house. He prayed that God would protect him and his family. Someone stole his car.

Even for Christians the world is a hard place. This is hardly the place for us!

That is the point. The wilderness is not the place God had in store for us. God created a garden for us. The wilderness is the product of sin, death, and the devil. When Adam and Eve sinned and brought misery upon themselves. God had to drive them out of the Garden of Eden. God had to place two angels at the gate guarding the tree of life so that they would not sneak in, eat the fruit, and live forever in their misery.

There is good news in this. You see, when God casts out, he does so in order to bring back in. That is what he is doing with Jesus with the wilderness. Listen again to verse 12, "At once the Spirit sent (same Greek word used for Adam and Eve being driven out of the garden) him out into the desert." Jesus is the second Adam. Jesus is sent out to work the ground of an uncooperative creation. Like Adam, he will die outside the garden (Mark 12:8). Jesus does this to bring us back to God.

Jesus is also bringing back the wild animals. That is why Jesus is with them in the wilderness. Isaiah 43 tells us, "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise" (Isaiah 43:19-21).

That is why the angels are with Jesus. The angels remind us that Jesus is no mere person. He is the Son of God. I cannot help but wonder if those angels serving Jesus are the very ones guarding the entrance to the tree of life. Jesus is the entrance (the door) to eternal life.

What does all this mean for us? First, if you feel alone in the wilderness you are not. Jesus is with us. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:15-16). Call on him.

Second, if you find yourself not liking this world, you are not alone. God does not like it either. Jesus was cast out into the wilderness to do something about this world. Remember, Jesus is the carpenter's beloved son. This is the beginning of the good news. Jesus enters the worst slums in order to make them new. There is no place too dirty. There is no heart too far gone. There is no sin too gross that Jesus cannot work on. You see what Jesus does with a splash of water and little bread and wine. Think of what this place will look like when Jesus finishes his work. "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).

There good news is that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Jesus will finish the work he began. You are his workmanship. You haven't seen anything yet! Jesus was cast out in order to bring you in!

**In Jesus' Name,
Amen**