

"Is this any way to treat a child?" Gen. 9:8-17; Ps. 25:1-10; Mk. 1:1-15
Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church
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We have different accounts of the temptation of Jesus. Mark's is sparse, to say the least. He moves quickly, so quickly in fact that I chose to read the entire opening of his gospel.

The first thing Mark tells us is that his story is about good news. It is the gospel. The central character in the story is Jesus Christ. He is God's son.

Mark isn't interested in being Jesus' biographer. He has more important things on his mind. There is no birth story, no shepherds or angels or wise men. There is no account of Jesus as a young boy visiting the Temple in Jerusalem.

Mark starts with Old Testament prophecy and moves immediately into its fulfillment. When Jesus appears he is an adult and the first thing he does is to submit to John's baptism.

One minute the heavens are opened and the Spirit is fluttering down like a dove and the voice is heard saying, "You are my Son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased." The next minute the dove has turned into a fierce hawk and with a screech and with sharp talons it is driving Jesus into a wilderness place of deprivation and testing.

The close and intimate relationship with God quickly gives way to a time of isolation and solitude the likes of which most of us can only begin to imagine.

Mark leaves it to our imagination. He doesn't tell us much about these first 40 days of Jesus' ministry. He doesn't give us the conversations between Jesus and Satan that appear in Matthew and Luke's gospels.

Mark doesn't tell us how Satan appears on the scene and entices the hungry Jesus with the reminder that it is within his power to change the stones of the desert into bread.

We don't travel with the two of them to the pinnacle of the Temple where the devil invites Jesus to step off into thin air knowing that the angels would catch him before he hit bottom.

We aren't privy to the view of all the kingdoms of the earth that Satan is willing to give into Jesus' control in exchange for a little devil worship...

No, all we get is a few short sentences that tell us Jesus was tempted by the master Tempter of them all and proved equal to the task of resisting temptation and remaining true to who he was as God's Son.

Could victory here be a promise of victory to come? Perhaps. But, even so, at what price? Is this any way to treat your child?

Jesus is thrust into the wilderness for forty days. He is tempted. Without itemizing the temptations we are left to wonder and to imagine, and maybe that is worse. We know the things that are tempting to us. Imagine what would be tempting to the Son of God!

It's in the nature of temptation that it has to be a live option. It has to be something that is within our reach or within our power to achieve:

Things like: The flirtations that can cross over the line. The petty thefts that we can so easily rationalize. The harsh words in reply to

someone who has hurt us. The refusal to forgive. The "little bit" of cheating on the test. The temptation to let someone else take the blame or, conversely, to take too much of the credit for a group effort. Convincing ourselves that the end justifies the means.

There are many times when we are tempted, many times when we give in to temptation. Usually the things that are most tempting are those that are within our reach, things that appear to be good and in our best interest, but in reality are things that send us far away from God and far from our true selves.

Our true selves are as children of God. That is who we are. As such we may be tempted to think that God has a special concern for us and pays particular attention to us. We may be tempted to shake an angry fist at God when things happen to us that simply shouldn't - - not to God's chosen, not to God's elect. This is no way to treat your children, if that is indeed what we are. And we are not alone with wondering about this paradox of promise and peril, of identity and adversity. God's people have wrestled with this duality down through the ages.

The children of Israel, God's chosen, passed through the baptismal waters of the Red Sea, into the trials of the wilderness of the Sinai, before their entrance into the Promised Land. Jesus, the Son of God, passed through the waters of John's baptism and into the trials and temptations of the wilderness before his final victory over sin and death and his invitation to us to enter into the Promised Land of close communion with God.

If the story of Jesus' baptism and temptation has any place in our thinking at all, perhaps it can be this: Jesus, the Son of God, God's child, is sorely tempted and tested. Identity and adversity go hand in hand. They are to be expected. As God's children we are not exempt from this same dual nature of our common calling.

The life we live after baptism isn't rosy. It isn't safe. It isn't free of danger or temptation or worry. It is a time of testing.

But it is also a time in which angels will minister to us. Perhaps you have received the ministrations of angels..?

Sometimes they are called "friends". Sometimes they are family members. Sometimes those angels don't even know the nature of their angelic timing, but we do!

And they are *God's* gift to us in the midst of the trying times we all experience. And we would truly be in the wilderness without them.

Friends, as we continue through difficult journeys we know we will be stronger as we travel together. This means connecting regularly with the rest of *God's* family. It means gathering around the family table for the meal that gives us spiritual life and strength. It means remembering our story so that we don't fall into the trap of thinking that *God* has it "in" for us, or that *God* just doesn't know what we are going through.

The *God* who has given us this good news of saving love in Christ Jesus is the *God* who calls us by name and claims us as his own and promises to be with us to the end.

This is indeed *Good News!*