

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

The first Sunday of Lent is set in the wilderness—
at least, it's supposed to be!

But Mark's Gospel moves much too quickly for this.

The wilderness and the temptation of Christ are just a passing phrase; Mark says,
“**The Spirit immediately drove Him out into the wilderness.**
And He was in the wilderness 40 days, being tempted by Satan.
And He was with the wild animals,
and the angels were ministering to Him” (Mk 1:12-13).

That's it.

Mark doesn't tell us anything about *how* He was tempted,
or where the Tempter took Him,
or how He defended Himself with the Word of God.

Mark doesn't mention that Jesus has been fasting these 40 days.
He doesn't tell us that Jesus was hungry and tired—just like real men get hungry and tired.

Mark doesn't give us any of that—
and that's why you've got Matthew and Luke to fill in those parts of the story.

But today our text comes from Mark's Gospel—short as it is.

And for all that he leaves out, He still keeps our eyes fixed on Christ.

For Mark, it's all about Jesus—
not Satan, not the temptations, not the fasting—
just Jesus...oh, and I guess the wild animals too.

Isn't it strange that Mark leaves out all the dialogue between Jesus and Satan,
but includes a mention of the wild animals?
None of the other Gospel writers do!

What Mark wants you to recognize about this Jesus,
is that He stands in utter loneliness, desolation, wilderness, and among the wild beasts—
for you!

The wild beasts that surround Christ are just like the wild beasts that often surround you.
These *beasts* are with you every day:
they're the sore throats, allergies, aches and pains that wear you down;
they're the cancers and irregular heartbeats,
the diagnoses of bi-polar, dementia, and clinical depression;
they're the bad bosses, rude cashiers, disobedient children, and reckless drivers.

Each of these beasts, in its own way, wears us down, brings us to the last straw.
 Each makes us wonder how much longer we can take it,
 they test every nerve and ounce of patience we have,
 and they wear us down.

When we're alone with the wild beasts,
 when we're cast out into the wilderness,
 and when Satan then comes along,
 we don't do so well.

When we're angry, or frustrated, or sad, or suffering,
 we're much more susceptible to listening to Satan's offer.

Sometimes he offers us an easy way out:
 whether its by drinking or smoking weed,
 by running away from home or cutting all ties with a long-time friend,
 or any of the other escapes each and every one of us has,
 Satan's way is always the easy way.

He sees your suffering and exhaustion, your pain and your loneliness and he offers you a way out.

But this you must resist!
 That's not the way of God.

God doesn't give you quick and easy fixes.
 He doesn't remove your loneliness or your aches and pains.
 He doesn't take you out of this world, out of the wilderness, or away from the wild beasts—
 no, instead, He gets right down in there with you!

And that's what Mark wants us to know.
 This Jesus, who's proper home is heaven above with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
 comes down into this wilderness,
 into our chaotic and sinful world,
 and spends 40 lonely days with the wild beasts, *being tempted by Satan*.

Our God doesn't take us out of our pain and suffering, He steps right into it and stands with us.

He takes the assaults of the devil, the temptations that are common to us all, and He resists them.

He does what none of us is able to do.
 He doesn't look for a quick fix or take the easy way out.
 He doesn't justify Himself by comparing how well He does against others.

Jesus resists the devils temptations because He trusts in God perfectly.
 He believes perfectly. He prays perfectly. He loves perfectly. And He suffers perfectly.

But the perfect life of Jesus doesn't do you any good unless it's given to you.
That's why Mark doesn't dwell on this temptation for long.
Remember, it's just a couple verses in passing.

Mark doesn't tell us what Jesus said to Satan—

but he does tell us what said after the wilderness temptation:

**“Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying,
‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;
repent and believe the Gospel’” (Mk 1:14-15).**

Notice how He doesn't give you a list of pointers or tips on how to defeat Satan.
He doesn't coach you along so that when you face temptations you'll know just what to do.
None of that.

No self-help here.

No easy way out.

Temptations will come. Satan will come. And you will fail.

“Repent and believe the Gospel.”

Confess your sins, your failures, your inability to resist Satan.
And believe that Jesus resists Satan for you.

That He gives His perfect life of faith and obedience to you.

In Christ alone are you able to resist Satan.

In Christ alone are the wild beasts playing tamely with the young children.

And in Christ alone is Satan cast down, death defeated, and temptation brought to an end.

You, dear Christians, are in Christ.

You've been clothed with Christ.

You've put on Christ.

Your life has been raised together with Christ.

All because He gave His perfect life on the cross for you,
and then by the preaching of the Gospel,
to you.

You are His and He is yours.

That is your strength when temptation comes.

Even if you are powerless to resist.

Even if you fail.

Even if you do it over and over and over again.

You are Christ's and He is yours.

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