

Lent 1            2/18/18  
Mark 1:9-15    B  
Leaving Complacency Behind

## SERMON TEXT IS THE APPOINTED GOSPEL FOR TODAY, FROM THE 9 CHAPTER OF MARK'S GOSPEL

“Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us.”  
Really? Do you think about that as you go about your daily routine? I am going to guess not. But, as we begin this Lenten season, I would ask you to consider this: If you did not wrestle “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places,” you wouldn’t need Jesus, would you (Eph 6:12)?

This Lent, we’re talking about God calling us home. We are on a journey towards our true home of heaven. When you travel, there are some things you need to leave at home. So, today, we are going to talk about complacency. My Dear Friends in Christ, **let’s leave complacency behind.**

One reason for complacency is compartmentalizing your life. What I mean is this: we do the God-thing on Sundays; maybe even give up chocolate or TV Lent, but for the rest of the week or the rest of the year, we find ourselves just going with the flow. That brief glance at that website that has now become an obsession; that little office flirtation; that financial sleight of hand to hide your dollars from the IRS or your spouse; running down your co-worker in front of the boss . . . it’s really not hard to compartmentalize your life, is it? The problem is . . . and when I say “problem,” I mean big time, eternal problem. The problem is that compartmentalizing, relegating God to this Sunday box, is sure to result in complacency. **Complacency jeopardizes your salvation.**

The opposite of complacency is **internal conflict**. God is calling us home, and in a strange way, an unwelcome way, God's call home causes us internal conflict. **The internal conflict we struggle with, or at least should struggle with, is the conflict between our natural desires and the clear words of God.** "Did God actually say . . ." the serpent said to Eve. In our Epistle James writes of temptation, "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. The desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (Ja 1:14-15). You know that all too well, don't you? Look at the internal conflict of Abraham in our Old Testament reading. Does He obey God and sacrifice his son?

When Jesus was tempted, the devil said, "If you are the Son of God . . ." The devil can lead us to rationalize any kind of behavior our unholy desires want. Rationalize, compartmentalize, and follow your heart is what our sinful flesh does. "You're number 1, you deserve it, you can have it all," the world cries to us. Dear Child of God, if you don't see the conflict between your heart and God, be sure that God does. The Bible says this, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). And again, the Bible says, "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law" (Romans 8:7).

How wonderful then that Jesus comes and says, "**Repent and believe in the Gospel.**" Jesus is not taking away the internal struggle of Christian living. He's not baptizing complacency. Just the opposite. Baptism calls us to intense self-reflection: In what areas of my life have I compartmentalized God? Jesus comes to us, as He came into Galilee in today's Gospel. He invited them and He invites us to believe in the Gospel

of God. The Gospel is such a precious gift; how can I hear it and not pray the Holy Spirit to help me believe as I wrestle with my unbelief and leave complacency behind? The Christian life is the life of repentance. So each day, we pray “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

An old German pastor wrote about the parsonage in a rural setting. Outwardly, the parsonage is a house like others, but whenever the devil goes about the village, seeking his prey, and planning where best he can spread his net, he goes about the parsonage thrice, and looks into every window. And most of all he rejoices if the door of that house be open to him and he cannot only make his way in accidentally, but rule there, and even hold his ground in the study, without being annoyed by prayer and the reading of the Scriptures. Watching and praying are the only bolts this thief fears. A parsonage is either a house of prayer or a very den of iniquity. There is no peace, indeed, for any of the ungodly, but **a minister who lives without prayer and struggle is the poorest and most miserable man in the whole village.** (Karl Buechsel [1803– 1889], in “My Ministerial Experiences,” For All the Saints, II, 338ff.)

What that pastor writes about the parsonage applies to complacency in all of our lives and in each and every one of our homes. God uses prayer and struggle to conform us to the image of His Son. Look at our Gospel reading for this 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent.

Jesus was baptized to show His identity with us sinners. Jesus has no sin; He doesn't need the forgiveness of sins. He had John baptize Him to show that He's with us; that He is the One sent from God who will fight for us. When He was baptized a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” And then, the Evangelist tells us: the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. That's the internal conflict we're talking about. Jesus knew the struggle against the

devil and all the forces of evil, but He never wavered in His perfect commitment to His Father. Unlike Jesus, you and I have evil deep down in our heart, even though we have been baptized, and like Jesus, we struggle against it. St. Paul knew that struggle all-too-well. He says, "I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Romans 7:15). In another place he tells us, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). We struggle against the evil in our hearts, struggle against the devil with the help of the Holy Spirit. And no, you are not saved by your works, as though somehow you can overcome your internal struggles by your own reason and strength. Rather, Dear Child of God, your internal struggles are a sign of the Holy Spirit working your life, living proof that God's grace is getting down into the sinful depths of your heart. God comes to us with His grace in His Word and in Baptism and in His-giving body and blood to help us see our sin, repent and believe the Gospel and overcome the lies of the devil and our internal struggles in Jesus.

"Though devils all the world should fill,  
All eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill;  
They shall not overpow'r us.  
This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will,  
He can harm us none. He's judged, the deed is done;  
One little word can fell him."

And what is that "one little word?" Jesus! So, My Dear Friends in Christ, let us use this reflective and penitential season of Lent to leave complacency behind and commit ourselves anew to Jesus. Amen.