



Daily Meditations

March 2-7, 2020

The Biblical readings are taken from the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer for Year 2 and written by the St. Stephen's Meditation Writing Team: Dave Boyd, Becky Denton, Pat Gillory, Traci Maxwell, Jay Nickel, Bob Reed, T.Cay Rowe, and Carroll Wilson.

Click on the scripture reading for each day to go directly to link.

COLLECT, Lent 1:

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Just the Facts, Ma'am

Monday, March 2, 2020

Mark 1:1-10

"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him." - Mark 1:9-10

Those of us of a certain age can remember one of the first TV detective stories called "Dragnet." It featured a crew-cut, plain-spoken police investigator named Sgt. Joe Friday, who was famous for his opening remark when questioning witnesses: "Just the facts, ma'am."

Mark is sort of the Joe Friday of the gospel writers. In his gospel, there are no skies filled with heavenly hosts announcing the Messiah's birth, no shepherds, no angels, no wise men, no stable, no escape from Herod to Egypt...Mark begins his gospel with the plain announcement: "the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

After a very brief introduction, John the Baptist baptizes Jesus in the Jordan. Notice that only Jesus "saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him." By the time Luke's gospel was written some 10-20 years later, the story had expanded to include all the people being baptized along with Jesus and the heavens opening. What had been an internal spiritual experience for Jesus had evolved to become a public miracle.

But the important issue is that the Spirit was at work, first within Jesus and later with all the people. Much later, that same Spirit is at work in our baptism, sending us out to proclaim the good news.

Driven by the Spirit

Tuesday, March 3, 2020

Mark 1:12-28

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness 40 days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him." - Mark 1:12-13

Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan, and he sees the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending on him, and he hears a voice from heaven saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Wow! Does it get any better than this?

Interesting that it is the Spirit that drives Jesus out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. It seems as if God is saying: "Jesus, I'm telling you that you are terrific...but don't let it go to your head. Take some time and begin to understand what you're taking on here. I'm asking you for nothing less than total commitment, and you need to be sure you're ready for it!"

Truthteller

Wednesday, March 4, 2020

Mark 1:29-45

"And he cured many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him." - Mark 1:34

It is interesting that Jesus would not permit the demons to speak "because they knew him." In fact, this is one of the primary themes in Mark: what it means to "know God." Mark has a long list of those who don't know Jesus as God. Jesus' disciples are baffled by him and clearly don't understand him. Peter, his closest friend and companion, calls him "Messiah" and is rebuked for it by Jesus because Peter doesn't understand the kind of Messiah Jesus has come to be. The chief priests don't understand him and reject him as a lawbreaker and troublemaker. In Mark only the demons know who Jesus truly is, and he silences them. Only at the very end of the story, one hated Roman centurion standing at the foot of the cross speaks the truth when he says, "Truly, this man was the son of God!"

Healing Power

Thursday, March 5, 2020

Mark 2:1-12

"When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven!'" - Mark 2:5

I've always found this little story in Mark to be fascinating. First of all, it says that when Jesus saw the faith of the friends of the paralytic, he decided to heal him. It tells us nothing whatsoever about the faith of the paralytic. It was enough for Jesus to see the faith of the good friends who carried the man on the stretcher and proceeded to take apart the roof to get to Jesus. What a testament to the power of intercessory prayer! Can you imagine what it must have been like to be in the crowd inside the little house listening to Jesus talk, when suddenly dirt and straw start falling from the ceiling as the hole is opened up and the stretcher bearing the paralytic is lowered down on ropes in front of Jesus?

Second, notice that we and presumably Jesus himself knew nothing about the paralytic--whether he was a notorious sinner, a righteous follower, or an

agnostic. And Jesus doesn't care--he heals him anyway. Jesus only knew that in some way this man's sins were paralyzing him, and he was determined to set him free from the paralysis.

Wineskins

Friday, March 6, 2020

Mark 2:13-22

"And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins." - Mark 2:2

"Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved." - Matthew 9:17

We can learn a lot about the early Christian congregations by a close reading of parallel passages in the gospels. In the first passage above, Mark tells his mostly Gentile audience that Jesus was emphasizing the importance of the "new wine" of his Word being put in "new wineskins." He seems to be saying that the old wineskins--the Judaism of his day--was too rigid to accommodate this new message and will split apart at the seams. Matthew, on the other hand, was writing to a primarily Jewish Christian remnant that survived the awful persecution of the Jewish-Roman War of 70 AD and had fled to northern Galilee. There they were in a tense competition with non-Christian Jewish congregations. Matthew's message seems to be that the new Jesus movement can still accommodate a reformed Judaism and therefore both the old and the new "wineskins" can be preserved.

Congregational conflicts are nothing new...they were present even in the earliest Christian movements. The challenge is to listen to both sides and to allow the Spirit of reconciliation to work.

Mountains Out of Molehills

Saturday, March 7, 2020

Mark 2:23-3:6

"One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?' And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food?'" - Mark 1:9-10

This passage gives us some indication of how much the Pharisees were determined to find any excuse to attack Jesus. Jesus and his disciples were out strolling through the fields and as they went, they plucked heads of grain. They were accosted by the Pharisees for working on the sabbath. Were the Pharisees following Jesus so closely just to see if they could catch him in a law violation? Don't they have anything better to do on a lazy sabbath afternoon? But then Jesus upped the ante in his reply, comparing his disciple's idle plucking of grass as they walked to David's desperate actions to feed his hungry soldiers when they were on the run from a vengeful King Saul. Both the Pharisees and Jesus need to lighten up a little here.

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