

Sermon for: Trinity Lutheran Church, Manilla  
First Week in Lent—February 17, 2024

Sermon Text: Mark 1:12-15

Sermon Title/Theme: “And Then We Hit Reality”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The basketball team’s early season schedule went well. The competition was only average and the team was focused. And then they hit the reality of tougher competition, injuries, and losses.

The wedding day was a memorable celebration. The honeymoon was a magical trip. But then, the young couple hit the reality of jobs, bills, and other adjustments.

The new parents brought their long awaited gift home. There was anticipation and joy. But soon the family hit reality—sleepless nights and demands for constant attention.

The confirmand boldly spoke the pledge of faithfulness to Christ and His church. But soon were there were the realities of life that challenged that faith and the difficult road of daily discipleship. No matter what our age, life stage, or family situation, we all have experienced and continue to experience “hitting reality.” For us as Christians there are the realities of life trials and the reality of Satan’s temptations.

Part I. The reality of Jesus’ struggle and ours

The Gospel according to Mark begins with Jesus’ baptism. Jesus’ earthly ministry formally begins with our Lord in the Jordan River being baptized by John the Baptist. The heavens opened, the Spirit descended and the voice of the Father affirmed “You are my Son, whom I love.” It was a wonderful beginning. The one whom John had said

would be “more powerful than I,” the one “whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie” was here. The Son of God would be about the great things prophesied of the Messiah. Surely His earthly trek would be a grand thing—a reception worthy of the King. And then, reality hits!

Our Gospel reading for today (Mark 1:12-15) takes us quickly to the reality of Jesus’ journey: “*At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals.*”

Wouldn’t it be more fitting for Jesus to be vacationing in a tropical resort or relaxing in the penthouse of a Jerusalem hotel? Instead, the reality is that He is in a desert—blowing sand, blistering heat, no food, bare and jagged rocks, isolation.

And He was “tempted by Satan.” Shouldn’t He be on the throne with all the earth (and even those below the earth) bowing down to Him? Isn’t this scene too much reality?

The account of Jesus’ temptation is traditionally the text for this first week in the Lenten season. It is no accident that we have this story at this time of the church year. It is meant to emphasize to us the reality of Jesus’ journey. Jesus’ journey to the cross would not be an easy, uneventful walk. It would be a sequence of earthly struggles, human enemies, and intense challenges by Satan.

Satan assumes that once again he can foil God’s plans. God had placed His creation in paradise. But Satan had tempted Adam and Even to want more, to doubt God, and to be like God. Satan had claimed a victory. God’s plan for earthly peace and joy for His family would be forever lost. Could Satan be victorious again? Could he interrupt God’s plan of rescue?

Matthew and Luke also share the temptation account with us giving far more details.

They tell of the temptation to turn stones into bread; to have Jesus leap from the pinnacle of the temple; and for Jesus to claim earthly wealth by falling down before the devil.

While Mark's description of the temptation is far briefer, it provides helpful commentary. Jesus was not just tempted three times but was "*he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan.*" It was a constant forty-day assault.

The temptations did not stop with this one period of time in Jesus' ministry. For the next three years Satan would appear again and again trying to deter Jesus from the cross. As Peter objected to the crucifixion, certainly Satan was there, orchestrating the objection, for Jesus responds, "Get behind me Satan." As Jesus was in the Garden praying intensely before the final phase, Satan was there saying "Don't go on." Satan was speaking through the thief on the cross who asked that Jesus save Himself and them.

Jesus was well aware of the reality of the struggle and the plan of Satan. He knew that His mission on earth would not be easy but would take place on a desert battlefield and in many other places as He journeyed to the cross. Every day Jesus hit reality—the reality of Satan's presence and Satan's intended interruptions. Jesus said "*For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*"

One of the entertainment phenomenon's of recent years has been "Reality TV." Millionaires, bachelors, bachelorettes, housewives, fear factors, and survival challenges are presented as being real. We know better. The settings and characters are often artificial drama. The real reality is Satan's challenges in our lives. It is his temptations for us to do our thing (or the world's thing) rather than God's thing. It is the harsh realities of life that make us ask "Where is God?" and "Does God really care?" It's

thinking the road of faith is wide and discipleship is easy. It's thinking that the Christian church is without struggles and temptations. And then reality hits.

## Part II. The reality of the victory

There is another reality. As we continue our Lenten and life journey we do so in the reality of Jesus' victory in the desert and Jesus' ultimate Easter victory over Satan.

Gospel writers Matthew and Luke tell of Jesus using the power of the Word to drive Satan away. "Be gone Satan! It is written," as the sword of the Word drives the tempter away.

The Gaza strip is a desert-like area where the battle between Israel and Palestine is currently taking place. In that area of the world the spiritual battle between Jesus and Satan took place. From the desert of temptation, Jesus went forward in battle to accomplish the final victory over the tempter. In the final battle on Calvary's Hill Jesus died paying for the guilt of every sinner. He died paying the price for every temptation we have ever given into. The Good News is that even though we are in the first week of Lent we already know the final outcome. Six weeks from now we will be gathered here on Easter Sunday celebrating that Jesus descended into hell to crush the head of the One who had interrupted paradise.

By faith His victory becomes ours. When we are hit with the reality of Satan and all his temptations, we have the reality of Christ and His victory. Romans, chapter 8, tells us about the reality of "trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword, death." But the Apostle Paul also celebrates in the familiar and powerful words "*We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death*

*nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8)*

The reality of Christ’s love for us leads us to be victorious against the reality of the devil and his temptations. Ours is the confidence of Martin Luther who wrote a song of victory: “Though hordes of devils fill the land; all threat’ning to devour us; We tremble not, unmoved we stand; They cannot overpower us; Let this world’s tyrant rage; In battle we’ll engage; His might is doomed to fail; God’s judgments must prevail; One little word subdues him.” God’s almighty Word continues to be our weapon. Satan cannot stand up to the power of God’s Word. Military weapons of all types are assembled in a desert to fight earthly enemies. The only weapon effective against our spiritual enemy is that Word. How important it is for us and for our children to have that weapon ready. Mark’s temptation account concludes with *“and angels attended him.”*

Angels had guided Israel in the journey to the Promised Land. Angels attended to Jesus in His temptation and again in the Garden of Gethsemane. God would not forsake His people or His Son. How reassuring to know that God’s angels are also there for us in times of physical and spiritual danger.

We don’t know what realities will hit us as we journey into this week and through this Lenten season. We don’t know what deserts of temptation we will experience. We do know that the Victor and His army of angels go with us. And so . . . we journey together in His peace and power. Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.