

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT  
FEBRUARY 21, 2021

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



*PRELUDE* *Jesus, Lead Thou On* Setting: Paul Manz

*WELCOME*

*ENTRANCE HYMN #718* *Jesus, Lead Thou On*

- 1 **Jesus, lead Thou on  
Till our rest is won;  
And although the way be cheerless,  
We will follow calm and fearless.  
Guide us by Thy hand  
To our fatherland.**
- 2 **If the way be drear,  
If the foe be near,  
Let not faithless fears o'ertake us;  
Let not faith and hope forsake us;  
For through many\_a woe  
To our home we go.**
- 3 **When we seek relief  
From a long-felt grief,  
When temptations come alluring,  
Make us patient and enduring.  
Show us that bright shore  
Where we weep no more.**
- 4 **Jesus, lead Thou on  
Till our rest is won.  
Heav'nly leader, still direct us,  
Still support, console, protect us,  
Till we safely stand  
In our fatherland.**

*INVOCATION*

In the name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
**Amen.**

*CALL TO WORSHIP*

Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful,  
**Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**

Jesus said: If any man would come after me,  
**Let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.**

Christ was wounded for our transgressions;  
**He was bruised for our iniquities.**

#### *CONFESSON AND FORGIVENESS*

God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. Therefore, let us be reconciled to God and to one another. (*silence for reflection and self-examination*)

Gracious God,  
**have mercy on us. In your compassion forgive us our sins, known and unknown, things done and left undone. Uphold us by your Spirit so that we may live and serve you in newness of life, to the honor and glory of your holy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life.  
**Amen.**

#### *KYRIE*

O God, Father in heaven, have mercy upon us.

**Your heart, O God, is grieved we know  
By every evil, every woe;  
Upon your cross-forsaken Son  
Our death is laid, and peace is won.**

O Son of God, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us.

**Your arms extend, O Christ, to save  
From sting of death and grasp of grave;  
Your scars before the Father move  
His heart to mercy at such love.**

O God, Holy Spirit, have mercy upon us.

**O lavish giver, come to aid  
The feeble child your grace has made.  
Now make us grow and help us pray;  
Bring joy and comfort; come to stay.**

#### *THE PRAYER OF THE DAY*

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us pray. O Lord God,

**You led Your ancient people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land.  
Guide the people of Your Church that following our Savior we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**



*FIRST LESSON*    Genesis 22:1–18

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.” He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here am I, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”

And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*PSALM 25:1-10*

To you, O LORD,

    I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust;

    let me not be put to shame;

    let not my enemies exult over me.

Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;

    they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O LORD;

    teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth and teach me,

    for you are the God of my salvation;

    for you I wait all the day long.

Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love,

    for they have been from of old.

Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;  
according to your steadfast love remember me,  
for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!

Good and upright is the LORD;  
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.  
He leads the humble in what is right,  
and teaches the humble his way.  
All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,  
for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning,  
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

*SECOND LESSON* James 1:12–18

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*CHILDREN’S SERMON*

*GOSPEL VERSE #198 from One and All Rejoice O Come, Let Us Fix Our Eyes on Jesus*

O come, let us fix our eyes on Je - sus, the  
found-er and per - fect - er of our faith, who  
for the joy that was set be - fore Him en - dured the  
cross, de - spis - ing the shame, and is seat - ed at the  
right hand of the throne of God.

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter.

**Glory to You, O Lord.**

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

Now after John was arrested, 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 in the gospel."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to You, O Christ**

*SERMON*

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

Dear friends in Christ:

Today is the first Sunday in the season of Lent. On this day we always read an account of the forty days of temptation Jesus endured after his baptism. The reading is very appropriate as we begin this season, not only because Lent lasts forty days, but because in this season we are called to examine ourselves closely, and our examination will lead us to notice that we face many temptations too.

This year we are reading from Mark's Gospel, and predictably Mark gives a very brief account of the event. But there are some unique details here which he shares, and a brief account can allow us to dig a little deeper on these. For our sermon today, we will examine each of the phrases which make up this account with the idea of gleaning not only their meaning, but also their challenge to us.

Mark begins by saying that "the Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness." This is the only time that the Gospels record the Spirit pushing Jesus like this. Jesus, we know, was full of the Spirit – as evidenced in his baptism. And Jesus would even give the Spirit to others. "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit," John had earlier announced.

Here the Spirit "drives" Jesus. The verb is the same one used when Jesus later "casts out" demons. Its usage here indicates that Jesus doesn't have a choice about his time in the wilderness. It's something he needs to face. Mark adds the word "immediately" to show the power and intentionality with which this was done.

We might then ask ourselves whether the Spirit ever does the same to us.

In the Old Testament reading today, we heard about God's great test of Abraham. God pushed Abraham to sacrifice his son as a test of Abraham's obedience. In past sermons we've dug into this text and I won't attempt to make a quick summary of it here. It's too complex. What I want us to notice today is that the ordeal is called a test. In the original languages of the scriptures, the word "test" is the same as the word "temptation."

In our lives, too, we sometimes face awful tests. These tests are any kind of threat to our health and well-being. They are the tests of illness, suffering, loneliness, and loss.

In our Epistle reading today, James says: “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial.” The word “trial” is also the same word as test and temptation. The word just gets translated differently depending on the context. To use them all together in a sentence, we would say that the difficulties of life are trials for us to endure, tests of our faith, and tempt us to respond sinfully.

James knows this can all be very troubling and confusing for us. That’s why he clarifies in his letter that God himself “tempts no one.” Rather, “each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.” We are tempted in the same way as our first parents, Adam and Eve, who desired the forbidden fruit.

God may not tempt anyone. But he ultimately decides what kind of trials and temptations we will face. And these become tests for us. Sometimes, as suggested by the scriptures, God is very intentional about arranging a test. Sometimes God just allows life’s normal trials to test us.

“Lead us not into temptation,” Jesus teaches us to pray. Some wonder why he would have us pray this. And yet the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness – knowing that he would be tempted there.

God reserves the right to lead us as he sees fit. He also invites us to pray for his help and deliverance. Luther explained this petition of Jesus’ prayer by saying: “God certainly tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.”

God hears our prayers. And God has made promises to help us as well – such as the one Paul explained to the Corinthians: “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

Sometimes life’s tests will be incredibly difficult to endure. Other times they will be rather simple. Jesus once asked Philip: “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” A great crowd was following them, and the people were hungry. The scripture tells us that Jesus said this to test Philip, for he himself knew what he would do.

Philip didn’t know what to say. But Jesus didn’t chastise him for this. And he didn’t make him wait. Jesus simply wanted him to watch closely and see the great thing he would do. As we know, Jesus fed that crowd of five thousand with just five loaves and two fish.

So also, God wants us to see the great things he does for us. And to trust him. For when we trust him, we can be secure and happy. Just like a child who knows of their parent’s love and care.

God might sometimes need to push us toward that place. The catechism explains this when it says: “God does at times test our faith, to bring us closer to Him and strengthen our faith.”

Yes, the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness. The wilderness – sometimes called the desert – was a scary place. There were wild animals there. And in the wilderness, Jesus would be alone.

Some have suggested that loneliness was one of the biggest temptations Jesus would have faced. Whether or not that was the case, loneliness is certainly a big temptation for us. “It is not good for man to be alone,” says the scripture. Which is why God calls us to community. And not just any community, but one that can be a help and support to overcome temptation.

This year of the pandemic has certainly been a wilderness experience for most of us. We are spending more time alone. And we are living with more fear. As such, the year has brought many new temptations.

God always helps us with our temptations. He does this by reminding us of his love and care., listening to our prayers, and making himself known to us in new ways. God also extends his care through the gifts and heart of his people, that we may be embraced by their help.

Above all, God extends to us the promise of forgiveness as we repent of our sins. That forgiveness moves us from a place of despair to a place of hope; from a place of shame to a place of joy. God's forgiveness makes us new every day. To live in God's grace is the ultimate help and healing.

The wilderness may be a scary place, but it is also a place where good things can come. When Elijah went into the wilderness to sit and mourn in despair, God came to him and strengthened him for a forty-day journey to his holy mountain. There God appeared to him, with great power, in a still small voice. Likewise, when Israel endured forty years in the wilderness, God taught them and purified them and showed them his care in many miraculous and memorable ways.

The prophets tell us that God does new and wonderful things in the wilderness. Including the greatest thing of all. There in the wilderness, God will bring about his perfect kingdom. As Isaiah cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. For every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

These very words were shared by John the Baptist in his ministry because John knew that God was doing a great new thing through the coming ministry of Jesus. Through Jesus, the glory of the Lord would be revealed. And through him God would work his salvation.

It is with this understanding that we can now see one of Mark's descriptors of the wilderness in another light. Mark tells us that Jesus was "with the wild animals." And while these words no doubt help conjure up the fear and threat that we mentioned before, they also witness to the good that will be found there. They do so by recalling the words of the prophets, who would often describe the coming kingdom as a place where "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them." When Mark says that Jesus was with the wild animals, he is no doubt foreshadowing the peaceable kingdom that Jesus brings. Jesus was with the animals. All were together in peace.

The last detail given in this account is that of the angels: "Angels were ministering to him." In the other Gospel accounts the angels seem to come in at the end and care for Jesus after his last battle. But this Gospel makes clear that the angels were present throughout.

The angels were present with Jesus. And angels are present with us too. We may not see them. But we should never doubt their presence and power. With the Psalmist we should recall that God "will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone" (Psalm 91).

God cares for us in many ways. And he cares for us especially in our times of trial, testing and temptation.

God does not forsake us. Nor does he abandon us. And because of Jesus, he doesn't condemn us either. When we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Knowing this, may God strengthen you – with faith and endurance – as you face the temptations of life. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

*HYMN OF THE DAY #656 A Mighty Fortress*

- 1 A mighty fortress is our God,  
A trusty shield and weapon;  
He helps us free from ev'ry need  
That hath us now o'ertaken.  
The old evil foe  
Now means deadly woe;  
Deep guile and great might  
Are his dread arms in fight;  
On earth is not his equal.**
  
- 2 With might of ours can naught be done,  
Soon were our loss effected;  
But for us fights the valiant One,  
Whom God Himself elected.  
Ask ye, Who is this?  
Jesus Christ it is,  
Of Sabaoth Lord,  
And there's none other God;  
He holds the field forever.**
  
- 3 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.**
  
- 4 The Word they still shall let remain  
Nor any thanks have for it;  
He's by our side upon the plain  
With His good gifts and Spirit.  
And take they our life,  
Goods, fame, child, and wife,  
Though these all be gone,  
Our vict'ry has been won;  
The Kingdom ours remaineth.**

*APOSTLES' CREED*

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.**

**And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

*OFFERING    A Mighty Fortress Is Our God    Setting: Ralph C. Schultz*

*PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH*

In peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the Lord to remember us according to His steadfast love and goodness in Christ and to instruct and lead us in His ways, that we may repent and believe the Gospel, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the Lord who placed the wood of the cross on the back of His only begotten Son to bless His Church and all those called to preach and teach, that the gates of hell cannot prevail against them; and for faith to trample every power of the enemy underfoot, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

To the Father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift comes, that He would keep us from being enticed by our own desires to misuse His gifts; for His help to use them rightly in service to Him and our neighbor; and for Him to bless all our leaders, that we may be governed wisely and justly for the good of all, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all catechumens and their teachers, all children and their parents, and every Christian home, that God would preserve them all from the assaults of the evil one and give us victory through Christ, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

To the Most High, who is our refuge in every trouble and has promised to hear us when we call to Him, that He would command His angels to guard our brothers and sisters [*especially \_\_\_\_\_*] and all those who suffer in our midst, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who commune, as His beloved Son comes to us here, that God would grant us by His Spirit to receive Christ in repentance and believe the Gospel proclaimed to us in His body given and His blood shed, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

In thanksgiving for those who came before us, especially Martin and Polycarp of Smyrna, whom God brought forth by the Word of truth and who now live and reign in His presence, and that the Lord would bring us to full maturity that we may be gathered with them in the glorious harvest of the Last Day, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

All these things and whatever else You know that we need, grant us, Father, for the sake of Him who died and rose again and now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. **Amen.**

*THE LORD'S PRAYER*

**Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done on earth  
as it is in heaven;  
give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom  
and the power and the glory  
forever and ever. Amen.**

*BENEDICTION*

The Lord bless us and keep us.  
The Lord make His face shine on us  
and be gracious to us.  
The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

*SENDING HYMN #418 O Lord, throughout These Forty Days*

- 1 O Lord, throughout these forty days  
You prayed and kept the fast;  
Inspire repentance for our sin,  
And free us from our past.**
- 2 You strove with Satan, and You won;  
Your faithfulness endured;  
Lend us Your nerve, Your skill and trust  
In God's eternal Word.**
- 3 Though parched and hungry, yet You prayed  
And fixed Your mind above;  
So teach us to deny ourselves,  
Since we have known God's love.**
- 4 Be with us through this season, Lord,  
And all our earthly days,  
That when the final Easter dawns,  
We join in heaven's praise.**

*ANNOUNCEMENTS*

*DISMISSAL*

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God.**

POSTLUDE *O Lord, throughout These Forty Days* Setting: Wayne L. Wold

ALTAR FLOWERS: *"For another year of life for our son and anyone else celebrating a February Birthday."* By Ian and Kristen C

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