

Mark 1:9-15
"Now is the Time to Act!"
First Sunday in Lent

February 18, 2018
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

Satan is a schemer who uses all sorts of tricks to lure people into sin. As we heard in today's Gospel lesson according to St. Mark, Satan even attempted to lure the Son of God. Satan knows no bounds. He believes he is all powerful.

One of Satan's tricks is illustrated by a Chicago-area drug user who became a police informant. As an informant, this man's job was to induce other drug dealers to sell drugs to him or an undercover policeman, and this informant was unusually successful.

One of his most successful strategies for duping drug dealers, according to Ted Gregory of the *Chicago Tribune*, was to give them a challenge.

The informant says, "I'd tell them, 'Everybody says they can deliver, but you look a little young; or you look a little old; or you look like a nerd.' Let the people think that they're in control..."¹

This informant succeeded in duping dealers because he understood their psychology. Satan also understands psychology, and he uses this same scheme. You see, Satan is not a figment of imagination. He is always lurking in the shadows to catch another victim to his kingdom away from God. He is not some cartoonish character with a pitchfork. He is real. Satan dupes people into thinking that they are in control. He challenges their egos. He challenges our egos.

¹ Craig Brian Larson, *750 Engaging Illustrations*, 481.

[Temptation]

In today's Gospel lesson, we heard how quickly Satan came into the picture. Right after God's only Son Jesus Christ was baptized by John the Baptist in the River Jordan and we see and hear the Trinity – the Spirit descending and the voice from heaven saying, ***“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”*** There he was – lurking, waiting.

Even though Satan knew Jesus was God in the flesh. He still tried. Satan believes in his warped mind that he is as powerful as God.

In the Koine Greek, verse 12 shows the violent activity of how this occurred. In English, we read: ***“The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.”*** But in Koine Greek, it reads like this: ***“The Spirit immediately throws him out into the wilderness.”***

Did you catch that difference? This ***“throws out”*** highlights a key activity, both its Spirit-driven nature and the fact that Jesus' ministry is now commencing. *Now is the time to act!*

So, right after Jesus is baptized, He finds Himself in the desert wilderness with the fallen angel Satan ***“and He was in the wilderness 40 days, being tempted by Satan”*** (Mark 1:13).

Here Jesus was tempted continuously. There were no breaks. Jesus emerged from His time of testing by Satan perfectly, without succumbing to temptation in any way. Satan loses again, but he keeps trying.

[Satan leads Culture away from God]

For all Christians who believe and trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior all is lost for Satan, but he never quits. He is always there lurking and attempting to convince us by saying, ***“Did God actually say”*** this or that?

You see, Satan wants us to doubt the one true God. Satan isn't satisfied with just the current count of unbelievers; he wants more in his dark kingdom apart from God.

Satan is thrilled at all of his successes when it comes to sin. Today, much of the wider culture no longer believes sin is a big deal. Sadly, many Christians agree with that.

The wider culture no longer sees sin as bad. They see sin as a choice, like picking what you want to eat, or what show you want to watch. We see this especially when talking about abortion. The culture does not want to say that murdering an unborn child is evil; instead they make it out to be a choice, so it takes some of the burden away from the parent.

The same goes with marriage. Today, the culture says it's your choice on who you marry, instead of following God's plan of the lifelong union of one man and one woman until death parts them.

Infidelity, stealing, greed, lying are all seen as choices, rather than sin. This is what Satan intended. Today, sin is a choice. Today, sin is praised. Today, sin is tolerated.

In reality, sin is betraying God. Sin is rejecting God's will and God's ways. Sin is any thought, word, or deed that departs from the will of God.

This past week, I came across a news article^{2 3 4} about an ELCA pastor in New Jersey who announced that she was transgender. Sadly, her bishop approved and blessed her changing her name to a male name and her congregation celebrated her name change from Rose to Peter. Again, sin is being praised. Sin is being tolerated. Instead of seeking help for gender dysphoria and repenting, sin is tolerated and this is hurting Christ's Church.

The Apostle Paul warns us to not be carried away by sin and Satan. ***“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths”*** (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

² <http://abc7ny.com/community-events/transgender-pastor-has-support-from-community/3059624/>

³ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/transgender-pastor-peter-beeson_us_5a833097e4b02b66c5129ebf

⁴ <http://dailycaller.com/2018/02/14/church-transgender-pastor-name/>

Even among us here today, when you choose a church to worship at, do you choose based on programs? Do you choose on the friendliness of the pastor? Or do you choose on the true doctrine that comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable? Do you choose Law and Gospel? This is why we, the priesthood of all believers, need to know what God's true inerrant Word says, so we don't fall into Satan's traps.

[Now is the Time to Act]

Now after John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel – the good news – of God and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel!” (Mark 1:14-15).

Jesus is saying, “Now is the time to act!” There is no more waiting! God is on the scene and is staring at you right in the face!

So, repent and believe in the good news! This is the most basic statement concerning the Christian faith – ***“Repent and believe in the good news!”***

Now, what does it mean to repent and believe in the good news? Jesus is calling on everyone – there is no person forgotten – He is calling on everyone to recognize sin truly and to be heartily sorrowful for it and to abstain from it.⁵

So believe in the gospel and go and sin no more! *Now is the time to act!*

Our Lord Jesus Christ is saying that repentance and faith go together. You can't have repentance without faith and faith without repentance.

[Sinners in Need of a Savior]

During this Penitential season of Lent, we look inwardly at ourselves and realize that we are poor, miserable sinners. We are in need of a savior.

That is what the Jews cried for many centuries before the advent of Jesus Christ – God with us, God in our flesh. They were calling for a savior.

⁵ Kolb-Wengert, “The Book of Concord” – Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, 582.

Today, we live nearly 2,000 years after Jesus Christ's first advent, but we know what He alone has done for us. Through His perfect life, death and resurrection, all who believe in Jesus have the sure hope of forgiveness of sins, life everlasting and salvation.

All Christians can now say, "***The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand!***" Stay away Satan, for you have no power over me! I trust in Jesus and He alone is My Lord!

We say this because of our repentance as we turn away from sin and the belief in the good news that Jesus alone accomplished for us. Amen.

Please pray with me:

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. Amen! (*LSB 656 A Mighty Fortress, v. 3*)

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.