

Satan had a problem. Satan's problem was this, the gospel of Jesus was becoming more and more popular. People of every race, language and way of life were listening to the gospel of Jesus and their lives were being changed by his truth and because they were listening to Jesus' truth they were paying less attention to Satan's lies. So Satan got together with his best demon advisers. Satan took his place at the head of the table and said to his advisors, gentlemen, we have a problem. Humans are listening to Jesus' truth, which means they are not listening to our lies. So gentlemen, I'm giving you 48 hours to come up with the best lie that we can tell human beings which will finally pull them away from the gospel of Jesus. So the demons went away and 48 hours later they came back. Satan reconvened the meeting and he said, all right gentlemen, what lies did you come up with? One demon raised his hand and he said, we should tell humans that there's no such thing as right because if there's nothing that is right then they won't be inspired to do anything that is true or good or beautiful; so let's tell human beings that there's no such thing

as right. Satan nodded his head and he said, good idea. Another demon raised his hand and he said, we should tell people that there's no such thing as wrong, to convince people that there's no way to determine if something is wrong and that way every person will be able to decide everything for themselves and no one will have to listen when someone else says what you're doing is wrong. Confusion and disorder will then rule. Let's tell them that there's no such thing as wrong. Satan smiled and he said, very good. Then a demon over in the corner raised his hand and said, I think the lie we should tell humanity is this, tell them there is no hurry. Satan closed his eyes for a minute and everything in the room was silent and then Satan looked at the demon and with a broad smile he said, that my friend is the best lie of all. We will tell them there is no hurry.

And, frankly, we may still be listening to that lie. What do I mean? Well, how often do I tell myself I've got plenty of time to change. I have plenty of time to do better to be better. I have plenty of time to do what's right and plenty of time to do what's just and

plenty of time to do what Jesus asks of me but there's no hurry. What a lie and yet I listen to it; we listen to it. Don't we?

Have you ever told yourself, I'll get serious about prayer after I retire. No hurry. Have you ever told yourself, I will volunteer at church someday. Have you ever told yourself, I will spend more time with my children or my grandchildren or my spouse, but after this next project gets done. Have you told yourself, no hurry, I can always work on my bad habit when I'm less busy and then I can focus better. Have you said, well yes, I will forgive that person, when I feel like it. Have you said I will be kinder, more patient, and more generous down the road. Have you said, I will be more serious about my schoolwork, I'll be more attentive to my health, I'll be more available to my neighbor, someday; plenty of time, there's no hurry.

It's a lie, isn't it? And that lie pulls us away from doing today what Christ asks us to do today. Many of us keep putting Jesus off till tomorrow but somehow we never get to tomorrow because there's no hurry. But there is a hurry. Jesus Christ is in our midst right now, today, and the Lord wants to do

great things for us and through us today. This is the first Sunday of Lent the time to repent and believe is right now, not tomorrow. There is a hurry.

In churches all around the world today we proclaim about seven verses from the first chapter of Mark's Gospel. Without many details Mark simply tells us that Jesus came from Nazareth to be baptized by John in the Jordan. Then Mark says that, right away, as Jesus came up out of the water he heard a voice from the heavens declaring you are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased. Notice in these verses Jesus sees the spirit descend upon him and he hears that voice right away as he comes up out of the waters of the Jordan. Immediately, he sees the spirit descending and he hears the voice from heaven, no delays, right away.

Now having just been baptized Jesus has another experience, right away. The very next verse says the spirit immediately drove Jesus into the desert, again no delay, no time to waste. Jesus has been baptized and as Mark says, immediately he's driven by the spirit into the desert where he will be tempted right away. In fact, Mark uses that

phrase which we translate immediately 47 times in his short gospel. Mark uses that phrase more than the rest of the New Testament combined.

In other words there is a sense of urgency in Mark's Gospel. The Jesus that Mark describes is driven by the spirit to do what God wants, when God wants, as God wants, and Jesus doesn't waste time. He pays attention to the spirit and then he does what the Spirit directs and he does it immediately. In Mark's Gospel Jesus will not say there's no hurry. Jesus reveals a God who is acting today to change us today and bless us today and that God, that same God, asks us to become a blessing to others immediately, not tomorrow, not later, not someday.

Immediately the spirit drove Jesus, that's what Mark tells us. Well that same Holy Spirit is driving us, but I often say to the spirit, I'll listen but there's no hurry is there? We keep saying to one another and maybe to ourselves, well I know that the Lord wants me to pray more. I'll get around to it. I know that the Lord wants me to strengthen my marriage or repair this relationship or actually sit down to dinner with my family.

We will get around to it. I know that Christ wants me to stop lying or stop lusting or stop avoiding the hard tasks. I know the Lord wants me to stop judging, to stop from ignoring his children that are most vulnerable and most in need. I will but there's no hurry, is there?

There is a fascinating sense of breathlessness in Mark's Gospel, this sense of urgency, the importance of what God is asking Jesus and us to do right now, today, immediately.

Think about what Jesus must be experiencing on a human level in today's Gospel passage. One minute he's dripping wet coming up from the waters of baptism in the Jordan, filled with a sense of the Spirit's nearness, hearing the heavenly Father say what we all yearn to hear, you are my beloved child, with you I am well pleased. Well I don't know about you but when I have a spiritual moment like that I want to stay there. I want to bask in God's goodness. I want to stay where I sense God's nearness. I want to enjoy the power of being loved by the perfect lover.

But immediately Jesus is driven from that powerful experience of affirmation and communion to the harsh barren landscape of the desert where there's nowhere to hide. There Jesus faces temptation immediately. I wonder, was Jesus tempted to say, really, is this what it means to be beloved of God? I thought you told me that you loved me and that you were pleased with me and now you immediately send me into the desert to face temptation? Couldn't we have stayed over there at the Jordan where everything was nice and loving and sparkling?

Well maybe Jesus is driven immediately into the desert of temptation because he's going to teach us a valuable lesson about what it means to be a beloved child of God. Apparently being a beloved child of God does not mean that I get to do what I want and when I want. Perhaps being beloved of God means that my greatest joy, my real fulfillment is found in going where God says to go, moving when God says to move. Perhaps being beloved of God means that I am constantly attentive to the spirit who will help me see that Christ is here now and together we have work to do now. There is

work that I must do in the name of Jesus, immediately.

Jesus faces temptations and through Jesus' answers to those temptations we see that a beloved child of God is obedient to the Father in all things at all times. Yet, I'm still tempted and as I look back on the first 58 years of my life I realize now that one of the greatest temptations in my life is that I'm tempted to keep Jesus safely locked away in that place I call tomorrow. If I keep Jesus safely at arm's length, always in the future, then I can ignore him today. Jesus who is always locked in my future can never unlock the spirit's power in my present.

Satan's advisor suggested, tell humanity that there is no hurry. That way Jesus never gets unleashed today. But Mark the Evangelist tells us, with breathless urgency, oh yes, he is here today, now listen to him, learn from him, love him, right away, immediately, now