



Pastor Gwen's Message
1st Sunday in Lent
Mountains and Valleys
Sunday February 21, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Custom would tell us that as a Jewish boy, Jesus at age 13 he would become a man. But for the 17 years that followed, Jesus stayed in his hometown and worked. Even though he had done some teaching in the temple at age 12, which was one of the only stories we hear about his youth, Jesus was for the most part just a simple boy growing up to be a man in an ordinary family, in a small town.

So for the first thirty years of his life, Jesus was a carpenter living in the town called Nazareth. There was nothing too very special about his life. He most likely repaired roofs, built tables and was pretty handy with wood. Jesus did not seem in a hurry to begin his ministry. Then at age 30 things changed for Jesus. His cousin, John the Baptist, came on the scene and Jesus knew it was time. His time had come to leave home and put God's plan for salvation into action.

Probably a good lesson for us to learn because sometimes we get in such a hurry to do the Lord's work, that we forget who is ultimately in charge. We would be better to remember things happen in God's time not ours. Last week we talked about being in a hurry to grow up and mature. Our whole lives seem to be hurried or harried as some might say. It is true that today we live in an instant gratification society. We have microwave ovens that are

surpassed by fancy pressure cookers, insta-pots where we can prepare delicious meals in just minutes. And to communicate we have instant messaging and the Internet that provides information to us in nano-seconds, where sometimes communications are in “real time”.

But Jesus does not hurry into his ministry. As he is baptized by John in the Jordan, a voice from heaven says that, “You are my son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.” This is Jesus’ signal from His Father in heaven that the time is right. It is His real time. Jesus is headed down the right path to begin His public ministry. God has reassured Him that He is on the right tract.

Don’t you just wonder if Jesus spent those 17 years between becoming a man and his baptism wondering when his ministry was going to begin? I think He already knew that his Father had sent him to do something special, but when would it start. When would the time be right? And the moment finally came and Jesus embraced it. The Spirit descended on Jesus and God spoke his ministry into being. Jesus was on his way, his way to the cross. And via the way to the cross, Jesus’ ministry has an unusually first destination. I supposed Jesus thought he would be ministering to the people, but instead, He finds himself out in the wilderness being tempted by the Devil. WOW. What a way to start a ministry.

Jesus was being tested right from the get go. A pretty rough basic training, if you ask me. It was off to boot camp with the Devil as the drill instructor. It was quite a valley to the mountain peak of baptism. And yes, Jesus was put to the test. And as we all know he stayed the course, he passed the three tests that the devil put in front of him. Our Scripture text in Mark does not mention the three individual tests as the other two synoptic Gospels do, but Mark does mention that the angels waited on him. God sent angels to be with Jesus in the wilderness. God provided for and protected Jesus. God did not leave Him alone.

Another good lesson for us to glean from this reading. God does not leave us alone in the midst of devilish torment either. Last Sunday we talked about being an Heir of God and co-heir with Jesus in our Unshakeable Hope study. God gives us His power to walk through this worldly life. It is the same inheritance that Jesus had from His Father. God’s protection and love never left Jesus and will not ever leave us either.

So after the 40 days of temptation were over, Jesus came out a blazing. He dove right into His ministry and kept on course. It was a course that would lead Him to the cross. Nothing could or would get in his way. Occasionally,

Jesus would retreat for times of prayer and renewal, so He could continue on with God's plan. But he stayed the mission. He stayed this mission with God always at his side.

Last Thursday was the reporting day for catchers and pitchers in Major League Baseball and Tuesday this week the full squad will come together. I cannot wait until opening day. It will seem just like 17 years before the season starts on April 1st. And I do have great hopes for a good year for the Brewers. Last year they ended up the season in 4th place in a division of only 5 teams. Their record was 29-31, not even 500 average. The team's superstar Christian Yellich batted a measly 205 in 2020 far below his stunning performance as MVP in 2019 with a 329 batting average. Talk about having a low point in ones career after the greatest season of his life.

Well, I am hopeful that the Brewers will have a magnificent year. I hope that they will reach the playoffs and go on the World Series, but I do know that there will be low spots in the season. Fans will have to encourage the team on and hope that they can find new heights even after the low points. I am a great fan, but even I can get discouraged and negative, imagine that, when the team is in a down turn.

But, I do know that mountains do come after valleys. Jesus in the wilderness, tempted by the devil, was a time when He would fend off temptation. Jesus would rise up to go out and do His Father's work. Not just the work of ministering the people, but also the work of all humanity, dying on a cross to save all sinners.

And folks we are all called to do ministry in the face of temptation too. Our mountaintop experiences will come and go. They will often be followed by valleys, sometimes-huge valleys. We may even be tempted to give up on our God. It is then that we will look for those angels that God sent us. And the Holy Spirit will guide us too and lead us through these valleys.

So as we go through the next 40 days, I hope you remember that there will be mountain peaks experiences and low valley experiences in our lives. Know that life will not always be easy, but be reassured that God will be with you. Just as he made his covenant with Noah, so it is for all generation. When we see the rainbow in the sky, we recall that covenant that never again will God destroy all living things upon the earth. Know that the valley times in life will not be the end. Use them to gain strength to climb to even higher mountaintops. And do not despair. The mountain top experiences will come

again. So see clearly, God's love for you in Christ Jesus during all the days of our lives. For God is with us always until the end of the ages. AMEN