

Sunday, February 18, 2018 – First Sunday in Lent
“Leaving Complacency Behind”

Mark 1: 9-15

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Process Structure

Adapted from CSL Series: “Leave It Behind”

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

The test started immediately. With the exceptions of a couple of brief episodes, like incredible signs of angels announcing, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,” and Wise Men being led by a star to an unlikely king, or maybe the time when he was 12 and wowed the teachers in the temple with His wisdom, Jesus’ life was lived under the radar in total obscurity. The family settled into Nazareth after a trip to Egypt and Jesus grew up, obscure and unremarkable. He didn’t stand out, He didn’t impress, He followed Joseph’s steps into the family carpenter/day laborer business. An ordinary face in the crowd. We know precious little about this time but one thing we can say – Jesus knew every day life. And Jesus’ life was a whole lot smoother before His baptism.

But then He comes up out of the water and we hear a voice from heaven say, “You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased,” and things take a sharp turn sideways. The Holy Spirit drives Him out into the desert to be tempted, John the Baptist is in prison and Jesus’ life is now one of preaching throughout the countryside, “Repent and believe the Good News!” We’re talking full blown testing now. The time for complacency is over. Jesus’ workaday life is gone forever and the heat is turned way, way up.

There are some famous words in the hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” – “Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us.” Really? Do you think about that as you go about your daily routine? Are you aware of the testing? Do you feel the heat turned way, way up? Maybe, you do, maybe you don’t. But then again if there were no forces of evil, why would we need Jesus?

This Lent we’re talking on Sunday mornings about God giving us a home and preparing us to leave behind the extra, burdening baggage on the journey. The series is called “Leaving It Behind.” You and I are on a journey toward having God restore a home for us. When you travel, there are some things you need to leave at home. You need to travel lighter. I’m terrible at

traveling light, I always bring way more than I'll ever need or use when I travel. It just weighs us down and burdens us along the way.

So, what can be left behind, to leave us less wearied on the journey? Let's leave complacency behind. Merriam Webster defines complacency as, "self-satisfaction especially when accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies." Where are you self-satisfied, unconcerned, blind to dangers?

One reason for complacency is compartmentalizing your life. Do the God-thing on Sundays; maybe even give up chocolate or something for Lent, and for the rest, go with the flow. Throw in an some contemptuous political commentary here, a little office flirtation there, a dash of financial sleight of hand, a pinch of running down your competitor... Not hard to do when you compartmentalize. The problem is... When I say "problem," I mean big time, eternal problem. The problem is that compartmentalizing, relegating God to this Sunday box (pointing to the walls of the sanctuary), is sure to result in complacency. Complacency gives in to the tempting. Complacency makes excuses, minimizes, blows off the seriousness of the tempting. Complacency wilts to the pressure as the heat turns way, way up. Complacency jeopardizes your salvation.

The opposite of complacency is internal conflict. God is calling us home, and in a strange way, an unwelcome way, God's call home causes us internal conflict. The internal conflict we struggle with, or at least should struggle with, is the conflict between our natural desires and the clear words of God. "Did God actually say . . ." the serpent said to Eve. Don't take my word for it, remember what James said – each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire he is dragged away and enticed. When Jesus was tempted, the devil said, "If you are the Son of God..." The devil can lead us to rationalize any kind of behavior our unholy desires want. Rationalize, compartmentalize, and follow your heart. If you don't see the conflict between your heart and God, be sure that God does. If you're always innocent, or always the victim or always are ready with an excuse, remember that "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law" (Romans 8:7).

How wonderful then that Jesus comes and says, “Repent and believe in the Gospel.” Jesus is not taking away the internal struggle of Christian living. He’s not baptizing complacency. Just the opposite. Baptism calls us to intense self-reflection. Ask the question: in what areas of my life have I compartmentalized God? Jesus comes to us, as He came into Galilee in today’s Gospel. He invited them and He invites us to believe in the Gospel of God. The Gospel is such a precious gift; how can I hear it and not pray the Holy Spirit to help me believe and not leave complacency behind? We speak with David, rocked out of his complacency after committing adultery and murdering the woman’s husband, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

Jesus was baptized to show His identity with us sinners – not complacent to let us be dragged away and enticed by our own sin, Jesus who has no sin, who doesn’t need the forgiveness of sins had John baptize Him to show that He’s with us. When He was baptized a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” And then, this is important, the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. That’s the internal conflict we’re talking about – Jesus didn’t stay in the smooth everyday. He didn’t stay above the mess, where God belongs.

Jesus never wavered in His total commitment to His Father, but Jesus knew the struggle against the devil and all the forces of evil. Unlike Jesus, you and I have the evil down in our heart, even down in our baptized heart, but like Jesus we struggle against it. St. Paul was very introspective. He says, “I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Romans 7:15). In another place he tells us, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). We struggle against the evil in our hearts, struggle against the devil with the help of the Holy Spirit.

And friends, complacency weighs us down. It stops us from lifting our heads up to the life and death struggle. You’re not saved by your internal struggle but your internal struggle is a sign of the Spirit’s presence, a positive indication that God’s grace is getting down into the sinful depths of your heart. In the meantime, we stay alert and we take heart, “Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill; They shall not overpower 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."

And what is that "one little word?" Liar. Devil, you're a liar! I'm leaving complacency behind and committing myself, today, just as yesterday, anew to Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen.