

First Sunday in Lent

LIVING OR DYING IN THE WILDERNESS?

Mark 1:9-15

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Analysis by Bill White

9In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." 12And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. 14Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

DIAGNOSIS: DYING IN THE WILDERNESS

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *In the Wilderness*
Many in our congregations are hurting; they are in the "wilderness" of fear, uncertainty, insecurity, depression and hopelessness. Why? Because so many areas of their lives in the United States are in chaos, e.g. the consequences of the banking and home-loan debacle, the troubled automobile and related industries, the on-going wars in the Middle East, job loss, job layoff, job insecurity, the loss in value of retirement investments, and on and on and on.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Tempted by Satan*
What's worse, countless folks are "turning" to the new president and congress to bring about "change" that will rescue them from their wilderness. How many are succumbing to the temptation to worship the powers of this world, to fear, love and trust their government instead of Christ? (I know it is not in Mark's account, but I seem to hear a seductive voice saying, "A new mortgage, a new job, more money, free healthcare ... all this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me.")

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Dying in the Desert*
Worse still, this kind of repentance (turning to someone or something other than the one true God who comes in Jesus Christ) and this kind of faith (believing in some news other than the Good News) leaves folks dead in the wilderness.

PROGNOSIS: LIVING IN THE WILDERNESS

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Dying and Rising in the Desert*

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near" (v. 15). At the right time God's Son, the Beloved, comes into our wilderness, is tempted as we are tempted, and dies as we will die. But this is Good News! By giving his life on the cross and being raised by the God the Father, Jesus becomes (as Herb Hohenstein would say) "our coffin-conquering, death-destroying Savior" who trumps the power of Satan, sin, and death for all time.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Repent and Believe*

Moreover, the crucified and risen Savior sends the Holy Spirit, empowering folks to truly have a change of mind and heart, to turn to God, and to experience the joyous exchange, i.e., Christ giving us the gift of true faith in exchange for our false faith in the powers of this world. (Is that a gentle but firm voice I

hear now saying, “Away from me Satan!”? For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only’?) Now, this IS change we can believe in!

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Transforming the Wilderness*

Although folks are still living in the wilderness of a world filled with chaos, those now empowered by Christ’s Spirit become Jesus’ agents of real change. The Kingdom of God is indeed at hand! In fact, it is transforming the wilderness from a place of death to a place of life, bringing help, healing, and rescue to those who are hurting, and proclaiming the message: repent and believe in the Good News!