

First Sunday in Lent, Gospel, Year B

A NEW ADAM

Mark 1:9-15

First Sunday in Lent

Analysis by Bruce K. Modahl

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: The Beginning of Creation

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Consistent Trespassers

Jesus' temptation traditionally is the focus of the First Sunday in Lent. Since Mark provides scant detail we are tempted to look back to Matthew, forward to Luke, or for some other subject raised by the gospel reading. Before yielding to such temptations consider sticking with Mark and what he is about with his lean narrative. Only Mark says the Spirit drove Jesus (literally "threw him out") into the wilderness. It is the same Greek word the Septuagint uses to describe what God did to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:24) in sending them out of the garden. Only Mark

places Jesus in the wilderness with the wild animals, the same landscape occupied by Adam and Eve. Mark's account identifies Jesus as a new Adam. A good thing too since we, the old Adams and Eves that we are, consistently trespass over the limits God has set for our own good.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Congenital Trespassers

The larger problem is we don't trust God to provide what is good for us. We want to make those decisions for ourselves. We can strive to trust God more and believe more strongly in God's good intentions for us but even that is an exercise of our own infected will. Our strivings will not lead us to greater trust and faith.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Driven Out

Anyone who would make light of our situation, or who doubts the seriousness of God's judgment, would be well advised to pay attention to what happened to Jesus: By making common cause with us he too was thrown out. From the Jordan he was driven from the sound of God's voice. He was driven outside the gates of the city to the wilderness of Golgotha and into the silence of the grave.

PROGNOSIS: The New Creation (or Jesus, God's Completed Creation)

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): The New Adam

I wrote in step 3 that anyone who doubts the seriousness of God's judgment on sinners has only to look at what happened to Jesus. Likewise, anyone who would doubt God's love for us has only to look to Jesus. The New Adam's obedience is to take on the old Adam's disobedience. He takes on our trespasses. He suffers God's wrath. But God raised him from the grave. His resurrection is the promise of forgiveness and resurrection for sinners.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): New Creatures by Faith

When Jesus was baptized the Holy Spirit descended upon him. By our baptism into Christ the same Spirit descends upon us. After Jesus' baptism the angels "waited" on him; the word is the one from which we get the word deacon. In the language of the New Testament "to deacon" is to wait on tables. At Holy Communion, with the eyes of faith, we see the angels hovering over the altar table when we sing the Sanctus (Isaiah 6). They wait on us, serve us, deacon us at the Lord's Supper. By Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Word the Spirit works Jesus' faith in us. By faith we grasp the promise established in Jesus, forgiveness and resurrection. He is the first born of the New Creation into which we are born by faith.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): A New Obedience

Agents of the Old Adam placed John under arrest. Against all the signs of the old Adam's power, Jesus came "proclaiming the good news of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'" We know that the old Adam's era is passing away. We acknowledge the presence of the old Adam in ourselves. To all the old Adams and Eves we announce the reign of God at hand in Jesus. Like the angels who waited on Jesus, we wait on him by serving others. In so doing we point to the New Creation at hand.

A man visiting his mother in a skilled nursing facility was moved by the tender care provided for his mother by one of the staff. He had no complaints about any of the staff. However, one particular woman demonstrated joy and compassion in caring for his mother that he had not been able to muster when she lived with him. He asked the woman about her motivation. The woman smiled at him and said, "I see a new day coming."