

Sermon Lent 1B  
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All Saints, Mt. Pleasant  
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Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And 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. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, 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.”

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This week as we were thinking about how to make sure our church is welcoming to young people, we realized it’s possible that we just aren’t speaking their language! So I ordered this book: a translation of the Bible for GenZ. So if that’s more your lingo, don’t worry, I’ll translate today’s gospel reading for you.

When his cousin john was all glowd up, Jesus pulled up with that holy vibe and said ‘bro baptize me.’ But john said, “bruh. R U for real right now?” But Jesus replied, “Nah fam, do it for the plot.” And john baptized the holy bro...but it hit different. Then a voice from heaven entered the chat saying “This is my son, he’s HIM, let him cook.” After this, holy bro went out into the desert to vibe with the Divine G For almost 40 days it was a mood, and the devil pulled up with his intrusive thoughts... but jesus clapped back with ‘bruh, you thought I was feelin you? Big yikes. Now yeet from me. You’re sus.’ Then the devil ghosted him, and the angels came in clutch. Then Jesus entered his preaching era with main character energy saying, ‘the kingdom of the TOP G is at hand. Stop cappin’ and admit you’re a hot mess before God, and stan the good news.

I hope that was a little easier for some of you to understand. Kidding aside, some of the Gen Z lingo in the book was actually really expressive of what the story was trying to get across. What better way to describe temptation as “intrusive thoughts” from the devil? And who’s to say the correct translation of John’s response wasn’t “Bruh R U for real right now??” We like to joke around and make fun of the Gen Z lingo, but the kids are alright. No cap. And though today’s phraseology may “hit different,” the message is the same. And this season of Lent, the message is this: “Stop cappin’ and admit you’re a hot mess before God.”

Pastor Kris said in his sermon on Ash Wednesday, The season of Lent is our opportunity for a reality check. Our opportunity to face the truth that we are mortal, that we are sinners, and that we need God and God’s mercy. Lent is our annual opportunity to pause and to do, as Gen Z would say, a “vibe check.” To take a good look at ourselves, our tendencies and our habits and see what is drawing us away from our faith, what’s stopping us from “vibing with the divine G.”

But so often, we just see Lent as an opportunity to maybe lay off the chocolate after Valentine's Day, maybe work on getting our beach body back before Spring Break. And if giving up sweets for Lent (or like me, trying to lay off the wine...) helps you take a step back from the pull of the world... then bestie, I love that journey for you. Sometimes taking one simple step back from indulgence is what we need during Lent to shine a light on how wrapped up we've become in worldly routines that keep us focused only on satiating our appetites and our impulses.

The reading from Mark's Gospel selected for today, the first Sunday in Lent go beyond a mere stepping back into true disruption of the powers of the world and the lure of the devil. Mark paints a picture of this series of shocking acts carried out by Jesus when he immerses himself in the Jordan right alongside all the local sinners gets expelled by the Spirit out into the wilderness with wild beats and angel goes head-to-head with the devil and begins to preach that in him, the very dwelling place of God has come near.

Jesus did not begin his shocking journey to the cross in order to bring about incremental change, he went there to accomplish divine disruption. He went to the Jordan to disrupt the hierarchy of the religious authority he went to the wilderness to disrupt the schemes of Satan he traversed a nation to disrupt the cycles of injustice he visited their enemies to break down barriers and he went to the cross to disrupt the chokehold sin had gotten on his beloved children of God.

Mark makes sure we know that Jesus' ministry was not about dialing it back a little on the things that lead us astray, but about calling out our demons by name, rebuking their power over us and showing their master that even in death, the grace of God will have the last word. That was Jesus's journey.

It began in the Jordan with unclean sinners and it led to the cross, where, right along with him, the power of sin, breathed its last. So if the season of Lent is our "journey to the cross," then it's not just about letting ourselves feel a little more guilty than usual or about singing the sad-sounding songs out of the hymnal. It's about disruption...the "holy disruption" that burst through the clouds at Jesus' baptism, that cast out demons and cast Jesus out into the wilderness to confront the teller of lies and to establish his mission of truth.

So if you really want to embrace the spirit of lent, stick with the chocolate, and instead give up negative self-talk. Go ahead, indulge a little. But stop believing the world's lies about you. Sure, reach for that soda you're craving, but rebuke the demons that try to draw divisions between who is acceptable, who is worthy, who is loved. Those are the kind of lies Jesus took to the cross: Lies that divide, lies that tear down, lies that lead us to believe that the lives of some are made more valid than others.

I have fond memories of my years of Confirmation classes... I mean nothing could be more enjoyable to a preteen than getting up early every Saturday morning and heading down to the church to spend three hours listening to the pastor teach us the Catechism...right? One of those fond memories was studying a chart that depicted the seasons of the church year as colorful slices of pie. If the year, beginning at advent, and looping back to Christ the King, was a circle, then each season got a slice - The season of Pentecost, of course being the largest, and then smaller slices for advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, and Easter.

That poorly-divided rainbow pie is seared into my memory, and I have to admit it came in handy whenever I was trying to remember what season was coming and what color went with it. And I really enjoy the rhythms of the church year, which allow us to plumb the depths of the

experience of faith, marking the mountaintop experiences, the valleys of darkness, the glory and the struggle of life with Jesus.

But even though we return to these seasons year after year, life is not like that nice, neat tidy circle, going around and around from start to finish. We never come back to the same place we were the year before. This Lent, you may find that it's not as difficult for you to be honest about the temptations you face. Or, you may find that the catalogue of demons you're facing this year bear little resemblance to the ones Jesus had to fight off for you last year. You may find that the prophet's call to "return to the Lord" this year feels just like going to visit an old friend. Or, it may feel more like an accusation, revealing just how far you've strayed from his side.

Yes, we circle back around to the same point on the ecclesiastical pie chart every year but depending on what we've been through, our path back to this point may more closely resemble an ellipse, a spiral, or...have you ever seen a tangled up slinky? Still technically circular? But not quite as tidy as pie. But if we take the Lenten call to disruption seriously, Hopefully we will see that over time that the arc of our lives Doesn't just bring us back exactly to where we were before, but that we've moving forward, as we grow deeper in our faith. And with the help of Jesus, hopefully we'll see that our arc, like Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "bends toward justice"

Each year, when once again we hear the call to "return to the Lord," may we more easily see his presence in our lives, and his face on the faces of our neighbors, no matter how hard this world and its lies tries to tell us that they aren't worthy, aren't acceptable, aren't loved. The Christian term for this change over time is "transformation," As Romans 12 says, "be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds." It's the change enacted by the regular exposure to God's Word, God's people, and the pursuit of God's justice.

As we make our revolutions around this crazy slinky called life, every season holds it's own opportunities for transformation, but the transformation in Lent offers us an opportunity to say "no." We may already be saying "no" to the little temptation we encounter on the daily, but we are also saying "no" to the patterns of injustice that perpetrate untruths about our neighbors? disrupting the persistent lies that convince us to believe something about ourselves than the truth proclaimed about us by God at our baptisms, when we were marked by the cross of Christ and sealed by the holy spirit and called "Beloved, Child of God."

While we need to return to this opportunity every year for our own spiritual health, right now, the worlds needs us more than ever to refocus our sights on transformation, to go toe-to-toe with the forces of this world because (not to put too fine a point on it but) they are making victims of our neighbors they are making victims of our children and denying the truth Christ died to establish once and for all.

Lent is a time for holy disruption. And for anyone who has ever gotten themselves out of a bad situation, you know that disruption doesn't always mean chaos. In the face of abuse, lies, and the kind of gaslighting employed by the manipulative voices of evil, disruption is exactly what will lead to freedom, to justice and to peace. As baptized and beloved children of God, our calling is always to be agents of justice and peace. To be advocates for truth no matter what the world brings. And this season, advocating for divine truth may look like saying "no" to distraction, to temptation, to those "intrusive thoughts" from the Devil. So if they start to creep in, just do like Jesus and say to him, "bruh, you thought I was feelin' you? That's so cringe. Now yeet from me. You're canceled."