

## First Sunday in Lent

Mark 1:9-15

The Holy Spirit “impelled Him” (NASB) to go into the wilderness, where Jesus fasted and was tempted for forty days. He had just been baptized by John and was about to begin His ministry. Why did Satan bother trying to tempt God? Why did the Holy Spirit allow it?

Because Jesus was true Man as well as true God, Satan had a chance! What if Jesus, in His human nature, could be tempted to rule on earth without suffering for the sins of His people? What if He could be tempted to become a consumer of material glory, leaving behind His ministry of love, mercy, and salvation? Then Satan would have the whole world and all of God’s creation as his own for eternity.

The Holy Spirit knew what Satan did not. The devil’s efforts also offered Jesus the opportunity to declare His allegiance to His Father. He was strengthened by God in the midst of the temptations of Satan, because He knew His Father and loved Him above all else. Jesus declared His intention to serve His Father and to save His people through the cross.

We may tremble as we read the story of Jesus’ temptation because we fear that God will allow us to go through temptation, too. It’s a natural fear. We know from experience how often we fail to follow God and choose to follow our own minds. We know how terrible it feels to fail God again and again.

This is where the joy of Jesus’ triumph over temptation comes for us. He, the perfect God and Man, said “no” to Satan for us. Then He walked to the cross to pay the sin debt for us. He was resurrected as assurance to us.

In the season of Lent we consider two things about ourselves—that we are very unworthy, and that we are very valuable. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...”. (John 3:16)

***During this season of Lent, make time for God’s Word.***

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## First Sunday in Lent

Mark 1:9-15

1. What happened right before Jesus’ temptation (vs. 12-13)? What happened immediately after the temptation? What is the significance of Satan tempting Jesus so early in His ministry?
2. Mark’s account of the temptation is very brief (two verses). Read about the temptation in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13. What additional details are shared by the other Gospel writers?
3. What was the Spirit’s role in Jesus’ temptation (vs. 12)? Why would the Father allow His Son to be tempted?

### For Family Reflection

4. The temptation lasted for forty days. What other Bible stories involve the number “40”?
5. What are some temptations that we face? Can we, like Jesus, be victorious over the temptations we face? What weapons do we have to fight Satan’s temptations?
6. Read the Sixth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer in Luther’s Small Catechism. What do the words “And lead us not into temptation” mean to you?

## Second Sunday in Lent

Mark 8:27-38

Of all of the people whom Satan might have used to try to dissuade Jesus from His ministry, who would have ever thought it would be Peter? He was at times brash, but he was also the disciple who answered Jesus' question of, "Who do you say that I am?" with "You are the Christ". Yet, when Jesus was arrested, Peter again failed to be true to Him, adamantly proclaiming, "I do not know Him!" And again we see Peter in his post-Resurrection ministry proclaiming the Gospel at the cost of his own life.

Perhaps Martin Luther's experience can help us understand this confusing picture. Luther once said that he feared his own heart more than he feared the pope and all his followers (even though he was in danger of being burned at the stake as a heretic to the Catholic Church). There is a desire in each Christian to follow Jesus with heart and mind. Yet, Luther's desire to serve Christ was still at times overtaken by that enemy that we all live with, our selfish and sinful nature. As Jesus said to Peter, "...you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

Lent is a good time to seriously contemplate Jesus' words, "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it" (vs. 35). Learning to lose our concern over our selves, and direct our total attention to Jesus, is part of growing up as Christians. Looking at men like Peter and Luther brings the realization that learning to lose our selves in order to follow Jesus is a journey that will not be completed in this life. Yet, God continually calls us and enables us to better imitate our Lord. As we seek His will each day, He forgives us our failures, shares our successes, and shows us new and exciting paths to follow.

***We learn to know Jesus through God's Word. Do you make time for it?***

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Second Sunday in Lent

Mark 8:27-38

1. The text shares Peter's faith. What did Peter confess about Jesus? What was the source of Peter's faith?
2. The text also shares Peter's limited knowledge about Jesus. How did Peter limit Jesus' mission? How did Jesus respond to his ignorance?
3. What does it mean to lose one's life for following Jesus (vs. 35)? What are you willing to give up for Jesus?

### For Family Reflection

4. Have you ever been ashamed of Jesus or of following Him? Does our rejection of Jesus leave us forever rejected by Him?
5. If Jesus were to ask you "Who do you say I am?" what would you say?
6. Why is this a good Lenten season text? (Hint: see vs. 31) How is your family (and your church family) observing the Lenten season?

## Third Sunday in Lent

John 2:13-25

The massive Jerusalem Temple begun by Herod the Great in 20 B.C. had shaky beginnings. Herod, ruling under Rome's authority, sent for permission from Caesar Augustus to build the structure, but encouraged the messenger to "take the long way around" to Rome. While awaiting a reply, Herod began construction. After some months, the message arrived from Rome that if it wasn't yet started, the structure should not be built, but if it was already underway, it was alright to proceed. The temple was not completed until A.D. 64, more than thirty years after Jesus' crucifixion and only about six years before its virtual destruction.

That's the story of the Temple, but what of Jesus' anger over its use? Does God get angry? Yes, He does, but God does not sin in His anger because it is always with just cause. Why was Jesus angry? Commentator William Barclay says that about ten years after Jesus cleansed the temple, the Romans ordered a census of the number of sacrificial lambs used at Passover. This was probably to estimate the number of Jews in Palestine since Passover attendance was required by Jewish law. Barclay says that the census indicated over 2.5 million people in Jerusalem for the festival. Annas and Caiaphas (The former high priest and his son-in-law, the present high priest) ruled over the dusty, noisy, crowded scene of the business of hawking sacrificial animals that filled the temple courtyard.

Worshippers did not usually travel the many miles to Jerusalem with their sacrifices, choosing to purchase them at the temple. They were often cheated. The animals, which had to be certified by the priests as without blemish, were way overpriced. In addition, the people were required to pay the price with temple coins, so had to exchange their common money—for a fee, of course. Some worshippers had to leave their cloaks as collateral in order to offer their sacrifice to God. Is it any wonder that Jesus drove out the traders? Praise God for the free and perfect sacrifice of Jesus!

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## Third Sunday in Lent

John 2:13-25

1. What was the significance of the Passover celebration (see Exodus 12)? Why would Jesus and His disciples observe this Old Testament event? When else did a Passover celebration become significant in Jesus' ministry (See Matthew 26:17ff.)?
2. Why did Jesus react so strongly to the temple businesses? Was Jesus justified in His protection of the temple property?
3. What "temple" was Jesus talking about in verse 19? What temple was in the minds of Jesus' audience?
4. Jesus words and actions were also prophetic. What greater events were prophesied? Why weren't the disciples able to understand the details of Jesus' ministry at this time?

### For Family Reflection

5. What lessons do we learn about respect for God's house from this story? Why is your church building so special? What behavior is appropriate in the church?
6. Sometimes parents tell children "This will make sense to you later." What made sense to the disciples later (after Jesus' resurrection)? What does it mean to have faith in things we can't yet fully understand?

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

John 3:14-21

Many people in the world claim that Christians serve a God who is cruel and unloving. They claim that God doesn't involve Himself with the world—perhaps that He set the world spinning and just sits back to watch—and that we have only ourselves to lean on for knowledge, wisdom, and love. Today's passage clearly tells us how silly those claims are, because today's verses describe the nature of God and the nature of man.

God did not choose to be aloof from the world, but to become a man in the midst of His worlds. His love and concern for His people is so great that he sent His only Son to show us Himself and His Father and to die for us so that, "...*whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life*" (vs. 15).

Paul once expressed the idea that one might be willing to die for a righteous man (Romans 5:7), but John, like Paul, says that far from being righteous, men "loved the darkness rather than the light." As it had been in Noah's time, there were, and are, still men of whom, "...every intent and thought of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5).

Jesus came as the Light who made the darkness of evil obvious, but instead of coming to the Light for healing, the people whom He came to save rejected Jesus and crucified Him, the only sinless being in all of the world.

The nature of God described by John is His complete love for us, and our complete inability to comprehend that love. Far from being a God who is uninvolved, cruel, or uncaring, our God is the Lord of love and salvation. His Son came to us of His own will, in order to restore us to Himself. Lent is the season when we take the time to consider this gift that He has given to us—salvation by His love and grace, not by our merit or wisdom.

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(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

John 3:14-21

1. What incident in Israel's wilderness journey is referred to in vs. 14? (See Numbers 21). What happened when Moses lifted up the snake? What happened when Jesus was lifted up on the cross?
2. John 3:16 is sometimes called "the Gospel in a nutshell." Why is the verse a good summary of the Gospel?
3. Why did Jesus come into the world? What blessings come to us as we simply believe in Him? What happens to those who don't believe?

### For Family Reflection

4. Where do you see "darkness" (vs. 19) in your life? Where do you see darkness in the world?
5. Who do you know that doesn't believe? What do you need to tell them? Why?
6. John 3:16 is sometimes put on signs at athletic events and displayed in other ways. Is it a good idea to share this passage in this way? Are there other ways to get the Gospel message to others?

## **Fifth Sunday in Lent**

Mark 10:32-45

On the way up to Jerusalem (always “up” since the city sits on top of a high hill) many disciples still followed Jesus, even as He approached His most dangerous journey. The crowds had dwindled because of His difficult teachings and the threats from the religious leaders, but many still followed Him. The apparent danger from the men that they had so long respected and feared was probably what was bothering many followers as they approached the city (vs.32).

As they walk, Jesus pulls the twelve apostles aside to speak to them about His death—not for the first time. Jesus states specifically that His death and resurrection are coming. But they really don’t understand—especially the “resurrection” part.

It would seem that they don’t understand the “death” part of the message either, or the coming danger, because two disciples come to Him with an odd request to be made at such a time.

Matthew tells us that James’ and John’s mother was also with them. You can almost see “Mom” dragging James and John to Jesus, having convinced them that they needed to keep their careers with the Messiah advancing.

Even James and John, who had ministered with Jesus, and learned from Him for three years, still thought that His kingdom would fit the contemporary Jewish belief that Messiah would lead Israel back into her glory as a military and political power in the world.

Jesus points out the suffering in the brothers’ future and also takes the opportunity to remind the disciples of the servant aspect of His ministry and that of His followers.

Before chiding James, John and their mother according to our own post-resurrection understanding, we need to face a question. How many of us have accepted Jesus’ command that we are to serve in His world rather than be served? We are empowered by His sacrificial service.

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## **Fifth Sunday in Lent**

Mark 10:32-45

1. What had Jesus told His disciples about His final journey to Jerusalem? How accurate was He in His prophecy?
2. Who were James and John? What had been their occupation before they followed Jesus? What request did they have of Jesus? What motivated their request? How did the other disciples react to the request of James and John?
3. What “cup” (vs. 38-39) was Jesus talking about?
4. How does Jesus define greatness? How did Jesus model greatness?

### **For Family Reflection**

5. In what ways have you sought some special recognition like James and John? Is it okay to be recognized? When we receive honors Who should get the glory?
6. What great (deeds of service) things can you do for others in Jesus’ name?