February 18, 2024 **GOD’S LOVING PATHS**

Lent is to be the time in which Christians remember and reflect on Jesus’ Journey to the cross. Traditionally, it is also a time to reflect on our own lives and faith to practice spiritual disciplines such as praying, fasting, and to renew our baptismal covenant as disciples. Lent is a time to consider what we need to release, which is another image of repentance. The question about the release is what do we need to let go? What has a hold on us to the degree that it keeps us from a daily awareness of the love and grace of God?

The Holy Gospel for this First Sunday in Lent is from Mark 1:9-15, a brief account of the temptation of Christ. We do not know precisely how all the temptations did come to our Lord. However, we do know that our Lord as we read in Hebrews 4:11 "in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin".  What is important for us to understand is that Jesus was tempted all through his life. Of all those temptations, the most troublesome ones had to be the kind of temptation he experienced in the very beginning of his ministry. Those temptations had to do with the use of power, and they were repeated in a variety of ways throughout his ministry.

One of the traditional themes of Lent is confession and there is one place where what the church has called confession is practiced religiously. Even if we are familiar with the practice of confession in our private prayer, even if we fear the idea of making an inventory of our Christian life, it is important to know we need to confess our sins.

To follow a confession path during the season of Lent means that we spend some time in prayer reflecting on our lives as Christians. It means that if that reflection reveals some shortcoming to us, then we confess that to God. We need not fear the examination of conscience nor confession, because Jesus has already paid it all. Jesus had done that once for all, for each one of us. So, reflection and confession are not supposed to be beating ourselves over the head with guilt and shame. They are our ways of recommitting our lives to Christ each year during Lent.

When God spoke at Jesus’ baptism, He had to rely on that Word, “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Jesus was hearing repeated confirmations of His Father’s love and concern while out there in the wilderness. God had spoken and Jesus had to believe that Word. In the wilderness there was not the constant reassurance of God’s love. We, too, need to believe God’s Word to us because sometimes there are periods of SILENCE when we don’t feel God’s presence and we don’t hear God’s voice reassuring us of His love and concern.

We need to HOLD FAST to His promises and Scriptures and not allow Satan to tempt us into believing that God has abandoned us or that He doesn't love us. We need to know what is in the scripture so that it is second nature to us, and it is there when we need it. When God gives you a promise, hang on to that promise. You don’t need to be reassured all the time.

There are three things we see in this passage. The first one is: The Anointing, 2. The Trial and 3. The Ministry.

Jesus had to be anointed by the Holy Spirit before he could start his earthly ministry. For the first thirty years of his life, he was a carpenter in the town of Nazareth. He worked and lived his life with little or no fanfare. He repaired roofs and tables and was basically a handyman.

I find it interesting that he didn’t start his ministry until he was about 30 years old. In Jewish culture a boy becomes a man when he turns 13. For 17 years after becoming a man, Jesus continued to live and work in his hometown. He was not in a rush to start his ministry. When John the Baptist came on the scene, Jesus knew it was time to act. It was time to leave home. He waited for the time God had chosen for him to act.

Sometimes we get in such a hurry to do the Lord’s work, that we forget who’s in charge. We live in an instant gratification society. We have microwaves to warm or cook our food and for instant coffee as well. We want instant results. We forget to realize that there is “real time” for everything. If you like to know more, please join us in our Sunday worship at 11:00 AM.

Peace!

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