**Mark 1:9-15 & 1 Peter 3:18-22**

**Sermon Videolink:** [**https://youtu.be/I1VX9igabV4**](https://youtu.be/I1VX9igabV4)

Last Wednesday was the beginning of Lent. Traditionally Lent has been a time when we focus on prayer, fasting, and giving for the needs of others. It has also been a time of study and meditation in preparation for baptism. Lent begins 40 days before Easter, but if you count the number of days from Ash Wednedsay to Easter Saturday it is 46 days. This is because the Sundays in Lent are excluded from the count. Sunday became the Lord’s Day, because Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday, therefore even in Lent the Sundays are still celebrations of Jesus’ resurrection.

Forty is a number that comes up several times in the Bible. In the great flood, as God’s judgement upon a broken creation, it rained for 40 days and nights. In the years leading u to the flood God tested Noah’s faith for years as he asked him to build an Ark on dry ground in preparation for a flood that had no precedent. Noah faithfully built and completed the Ark and God saved his family by keeping them isafely with the animals in the ark. After the flood God made a gracious promise to never destroy Noah, his descendants and creation by flood again. He sealed his promise by putting a rainbow, in the sky as a symbol of his love and grace.

Centuries later, Pharoah who had been committing genocide against the enslaved children of Israel, chased them across the Red Sea with his army. Again, God used water to both judge and save. God opened free passage to the Israelites but destroyed Pharoah’s army by closing the waters.

Soon afterward, Moses went up onto Mount Sinai for 40 days and nights to receive God’s Law. God tested the people as they anxiously waited for Moses. They lost faith, turned from God, and made a golden calf to worship.

Instead of destroying the people God graciously let them live but he also pronounced a judgement upon that generation, that they would never step foot in the promised land. They had to wander the Sinai wilderness for 40 years. A time during which their faith was tested and strengthened.

Many years later the prophet Elijah ran for his life to the wilderness, from Queen Jezebel. He found a bush, sat under it, and wanted to die, because he was afraid and felt like the only one left who believed in God. God graciously sent an angel to give him food and water and take care of him. When he recovered, strengthened by the food and water he travelled for 40 days to Mount Horeb, where God graciously revealed himself to Elijah, and assured him he was not alone. Most scholars think Horeb is Mount Sinai.

Today we heard that Jesus passed through the waters of Baptism and then the Spirit sent him for 40 days in the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. God graciously took care of him, sending angels to tend him.

The 40 days of Lent remind us of the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness. They also remind us of all the other times when God intervened to judge, test and save his chosen people. It reminds us that we too have been judged, tested, and saved by God, through water. The water of Baptism. We have been washed and judged clean. Since God has washed us clean, we have a clear conscience before God. The rainbow for us is not only a promise that God will never again destroy the whole earth by flood, but a promise that we have been saved by the resurrection of Jesus.

Today as we remember the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness, we are also reminded of a practice that many people take part in during Lent. Fasting. Fasting can take many forms. You can restrict your eating in some way, spend less time watching TV, or give up some time to help someone in need.

I happen to love chocolate and in some previous congregations I made it well known that I love chocolate. One of my favourite chocolates used to be Mars Bars. I would have a Mars Bar several times a week. One Lent I put a Mars Bar on the church altar and told everyone that my fast for Lent would be to give up Mars Bars for 40 days.

I am not suggesting that you must fast during Lent, because as the Baptised children of God we have complete freedom. Yet the way God has made us, it helps to have periods set aside when we can refocus our lives on what is important. To develop habits that strengthen our relationship with God, like reading and reflecting on God’s Word. Habits like praying. Habits like reminding ourselves of God’s love for us by crossing ourselves in the shower to remind us of our Baptism. Habits like putting God’s love into practice by giving to those in need and if you find it helpful, times of fasting.

At first it was difficult to stop eating those Mars Bars. Every time I felt like a Mars Bar, I thought about, my public commitment, which in turn led me to think about how much more Jesus had given up. He had given up the comfort of heaven to take on a human body and live as one of us. He gave up his power, refusing to satisfy his hunger during forty days in the wilderness.

The forty days of temptation were only the beginning of many temptations for Jesus. He also resisted the temptation to use his power for his own benefit, even refusing to call down the angels to stop his crucifixion and death. The only time Jesus used his power was to heal and free people from sin, sickness, hunger, danger and Satan.

Fasting helps to focus the mind. Even a fast where you only give up Mars Bars. It reminds us that we are continually experiencing temptations. When you do experience temptation then remember, as a baptised child of God you are no longer under Satan’s power. You do not have to give in to temptation, whether it comes from your mind, your heart, the world or even from Satan.

You have God’s Word as a weapon against temptation and as God’s beloved child you can also talk directly to God and ask for help. Therefore, when you are tempted pray “deliver me from temptation.” At your baptism you received the Holy Spirit who can minister to your inner spirit and intercede for you when temptation becomes overwhelming.

Finally remember that Jesus is your brother and friend, and he is always with you and therefore you are never alone in your temptation. Turn to Jesus and ask him to hold you firm because he has defeated all temptation.

**Amen**

PS.

I managed to go without Mars Bars for 40 days, but I did wonder whether it was safe to leave a Mars Bar on the altar for 40 days. Easter Sunday as I went up to the altar to finally grab my Mars Bar, to my surprise and joy I noticed someone had placed a second Mars Bar next to mine. I never discovered who the kind person was.