



Queen Anne

LUTHERAN CHURCH

Called to Proclaim God's Love in Christ for Every Person

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Pastor	The Rev. Dr. Dan Peterson
Cantor	Kyle Haugen
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FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

February 21, 2021

"Word Out" audio transcript



Prelude

Improvisation on CONSOLATION

Welcome

P: Welcome, this first Sunday in Lent, to Queen Anne Lutheran Church.

Wherever you are listening, whatever challenges you might be facing, we invite you into this space: one where you can hear the good news through proclamation, spoken and sung; a time where you can be still, and know God is God.

On Ash Wednesday, we began our journey toward immersion in the death and resurrection of Christ. This year, we invite you to join us in spirit as we reflect, open ourselves to renewal, and prepare for the death of our Lord, whose life was poured out as an expression of the love God has for each of us, our world, and the cosmos of a trillion glittering stars God created.


Greeting

☞: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

☛: And also with you.

Gospel Acclamation (*congregation may join*)


Matthew 4:4

C: 
Let your stead - fast love come to us, O Lord.


Save us as you prom - ised; we will trust your word.



P: One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

C: 
Let your stead - fast love come to us, O Lord.


Save us as you prom - ised; we will trust your word.

The Holy Gospel:

Mark 1:9-15

A: The Holy Gospel according to Mark, the first chapter.

C: **Glory to you, O Lord.**

A: 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.”

A: The Gospel of the Lord.

G: Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

The Good News of Torn Skies
Pastor Dan Peterson

It’s a dreadful feeling as a pastor. You spend hours writing a sermon, only to realize late, the night before it’s due, that it's not going to work. It’s devastating, especially when the experience of writing last week’s sermon was so enjoyable.

I called last week’s sermon “The Transfiguration of Peter.” The title alone was meant to give listeners pause. According to the Gospels, *Christ* was the one who was transfigured – not Peter!

Like I said, it was exhilarating to write. Ever since I was a kid, I have loved writing stories. My third-grade teacher inspired me. He would often have us write stories in class, and usually when he did my imagination soared! By the end of that year I was hooked, and my love of writing never left me. In college I majored in English with an emphasis in creative writing. I was also the fiction editor of the university's literary magazine. In spite of the many difficult moments that come with writing, including occasionally insurmountable writer’s block, I couldn’t stop.

What I love about writing stories is the way they can propel you into another world. When the writing goes well, the experience is almost

effortless. You get the sensation that you are an onlooker waiting to see what happens, watching as the narrative unfolds, and when something exciting appears out of nowhere you feel like jumping out of your seat.

Writings sermons, on the other hand, can be a *totally* different experience. If you are a linear thinker like I am, everything must follow a logical order. You don't simply watch as the events in a narrative unfold. You make a case, brick by brick by heavy brick.

Before the pandemic I would write short stories like "The Transfiguration of Peter" about once every three to six months, in part to offer some variety and to take a break from ordinary sermons. But this week I got greedy. I wanted to write *another* short story, one right after the next. Unfortunately, after a grueling six hours at the dining room table in the parsonage, I realized I had failed. The story I had put together just didn't feel right. As the second-hand on the clock in the kitchen audibly ticked away, I realized it just wasn't coming together. I had to quit.

Now don't get me wrong. The concept wasn't terrible. I thought it would be intriguing to put the discoveries I made while researching Mark 1:9-15 into a dialogue between a professor and two students. They would debate the topic in a process that would lead to a discovery, one that ultimately would surprise not only the students but perhaps some of you listening as well.

By page 10 of the story, however, I had only covered the couple verses of our Gospel reading! Another 10 pages would have meant preaching a 30-to-40-minute sermon. My congregation – those of you listening – would never forgive me for that!

So, I had to take a different path and time was running out.

Beginning Again

What I realized as I reviewed my notes along with the story I had now partially written, was that there were several hidden gems in today's reading that I wanted to share, references that would have made sense to Mark's original audience but would be lost on us today. But this had to be

more than a lecture, I thought. As a pastor in the Lutheran church, I am called to preach the gospel, the good news.

In a moment, then, I am going to share with you the gospel I discovered in Mark 1:9-15. But here's the thing: it's not simply that "the kingdom of God has come near," as Jesus says in the last verse of our reading. It's something that happens earlier in v. 10, something you would never suspect – or at least something I never would.

Let's start by taking a step back and considering Mark as a whole. Most scholars think that Mark is the oldest of the four Gospels. This account of the ministry, death and resurrection of Christ contains a mere sixteen chapters. It was probably written against the backdrop of Christian persecution which peaked in the sixth decade of the first century under the Emperor Nero. Some suspect, based on the original ending of Mark, that the author himself was martyred.

Matthew and Luke, according to the dominant theory, relied on Mark as source material when they retold the story of Jesus roughly ten to fifteen years later. But Matthew and Luke did more than simply retell the story. They elaborated by adding material derived from other sources, including a lost Gospel that scholars have since reconstructed as well as independent oral tradition. Matthew and Luke recount the story of Jesus' birth, something completely absent in Mark. They also include stories about his resurrection, of how and where he appeared to his followers after he died. Mark, by contrast, says nothing, at least according to the oldest versions we have which end at verse 8 of chapter sixteen.

In today's reading, we have a great example of a story that originally appears in Mark which Matthew and Luke appropriate and develop considerably. After Jesus is baptized, Mark tells us that "the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him" 1:12-13). Then, Mark says, Jesus came to Galilee to proclaim the good news.

Now imagine if you were Matthew or Luke, charged with the task of retelling the story ten or fifteen years later to different audiences. What's missing in Mark's account? I don't know about you, but I want more details! Mark tells me nothing about what the temptations were or how Christ overcame them. We know he did. Otherwise, the story would have ended in the wilderness; Jesus, having succumbed to temptation, would have been devoured by the wild beasts. The fact that he returns to Galilee and preaches the good news implies that he was victorious, but how did he do it? How did he defeat Satan?

Matthew and Luke answer these questions. They supply details absent in Mark, including both the nature and number of the temptations Jesus suffered as well as how he overcame them. This makes for a much more satisfying account, one where the questions an audience would have presumably been asking with respect to Mark's account were answered. But maybe Mark's audience didn't require the elaboration that Matthew and Luke supplied. Maybe, as Jews living in the first century, they recognized clues Mark provided in the account that would subsequently be lost on Gentiles who were unfamiliar with the Hebrew Scriptures. Maybe they wouldn't need additional details, and maybe we wouldn't either if we knew how to decipher these clues!

Three Secrets

To unpack the deeper meaning of the temptation in the wilderness according to Mark, we need know what he meant by the word "wilderness," the significance of the number forty, and what the wild beasts symbolize.

When we use the word "wilderness" we think of nature, of places uninhabited by human beings. The ancient Israelites, on the other hand, understood the term differently. As Denis Baly explains in the *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, "a wilderness was not defined by geographic features so much as by a perception of disorder and danger.

A wilderness was usually assumed to be a home of wild beasts and savage wandering tribes" (1104).

In those instances where the "wilderness" was associated with a specific place, Baly adds, it was typically a place without water, a desert.

New Testament writers inherited their understanding of the wilderness from Jewish tradition. They, too, equated it with "waterless places," but, they add, these places were inhabited by evil spirits. Hence, when Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, he was tempted by the leader of these spirits, Satan. Thus, when Mark says that Jesus entered the wilderness, he implies that he entered a place of chaos and disorder, one where wild beasts roam and human beings have no control. I think of it as a place beyond words, a time of trial, one that involves the testing of a prophet, as was the case for Elijah according to 1 Kings 19:8.

When Mark remarks next that Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, he offers another clue his original audience would have deciphered, one we might grasp as well. "The number forty is an expression commonly used in the OT to indicate a fairly long period of time" (*Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary*, 647). We might think, for example, of Noah and the story of the flood where "rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights" (Genesis 7:12).

Of course, by pairing "forty" with the word "wilderness," Mark is alluding to another story from the Hebrew Bible. Most of us know it. The Israelites, we recall, wandered through the wilderness for forty years until they came to the Promised Land and they did so with a purpose. "Israel," as Elizabeth Malbon point out, "was in the wilderness being tested (in the sense of prepared) by God for forty years during the exodus; not everyone passed the test. Jesus was [likewise] in the wilderness for forty days being tested/prepared by God. He seems to be ready because he is not eaten up by the wild beasts but rather 'served'/'ministered to' by angels, the messengers of God. Jesus too will bear a message and serve as God's agent" (*Women's Bible Commentary*, 481).

Mark's message finally emerges just as God provided for the Israelites in their wilderness, so God provided for Jesus in his. How, we might ask, might God provide for us when we find ourselves in the wilderness? When we experience disorder and chaos in our lives, and certainly we have plenty of it around us, will our trust in God sustain us as it did Jesus and before him the Israelites?

We have now, thanks to the help of a few commentaries, uncovered the deeper meaning of the term "wilderness," the significance of the number 40, and the reference to the "wild beasts." The fact that Jesus emerged after his time in the wilderness indicates he was ready to be God's ambassador, to proclaim the good news.

But what good news, apart from the fact that God sustained him in the wilderness, did Jesus have to proclaim? It's here that a final clue emerges, not in the story of the temptation, but in the account of his baptism just a few verses earlier.

The Good News of Torn Skies

Mark tells us that when Jesus was coming up out of the water, "he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him" (1:10). Some translations simply say the heavens, the skies, were opened. This is a "fairly mild translation," however, "of a rather violent Greek word meaning 'split apart'" (*Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary*, 646). But what does it mean?

According to biblical scholar Osvaldo Vena, "The Jewish people believed that prophecy had ceased with the last prophets but that it would be restored at the end-times (Malachi 4:5-6). The heavens had 'closed,' as it were, and there was no direct communication from God to humankind anymore Here we have an absolutely revolutionary claim: the God of Israel is speaking again and has chosen to do it through a humble peasant from Galilee!" ("Working Preacher").

Now let's put this all together: Jesus and his contemporaries lived during a time where God was perceived to be absent or at least no longer speaking.

The heavens were closed. As Richard Elliott Friedman observes, “What was left was the book and the law [of Moses]. It was not that the law had become such a burden It was that the law, even at its most meaningful, was still not the equal of seeing fire come out of the sky or water come out of a rock or hearing the voice of God. The Christian story said that God had come close once again, in ‘modern’ times, and in an even more personal form than before. ‘Glad tidings,’ indeed” (*The Hidden Face of God*, 136).

The kingdom of God, as Jesus proclaims upon his return from the wilderness, had come near (Mark 1:15). This is the good news! The skies, indicative of a barrier between God and human beings, had been torn asunder! Out of them God’s presence descends in the form of a dove, now dwelling in his Son, Jesus Christ, the bearer of this glad tidings!

God, in short, has joined us in our sighs and suffering, our struggles and sorrows. *This* is the good news.

Do we not also live in a time where the heavens seem closed, where God no longer speaks, a time when the pandemic continues to rob thousands upon thousands of people their lives, a time where bitter partisanship and violence threatens to tear us and democracy itself apart?

This Lent, as we prepare, reflect, and seek renewal, as we too find ourselves in the wilderness, let us remember that God joins us in the person of God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. The skies have been torn apart! God speaks, and that is good news!

Amen.

Hymn of the Day

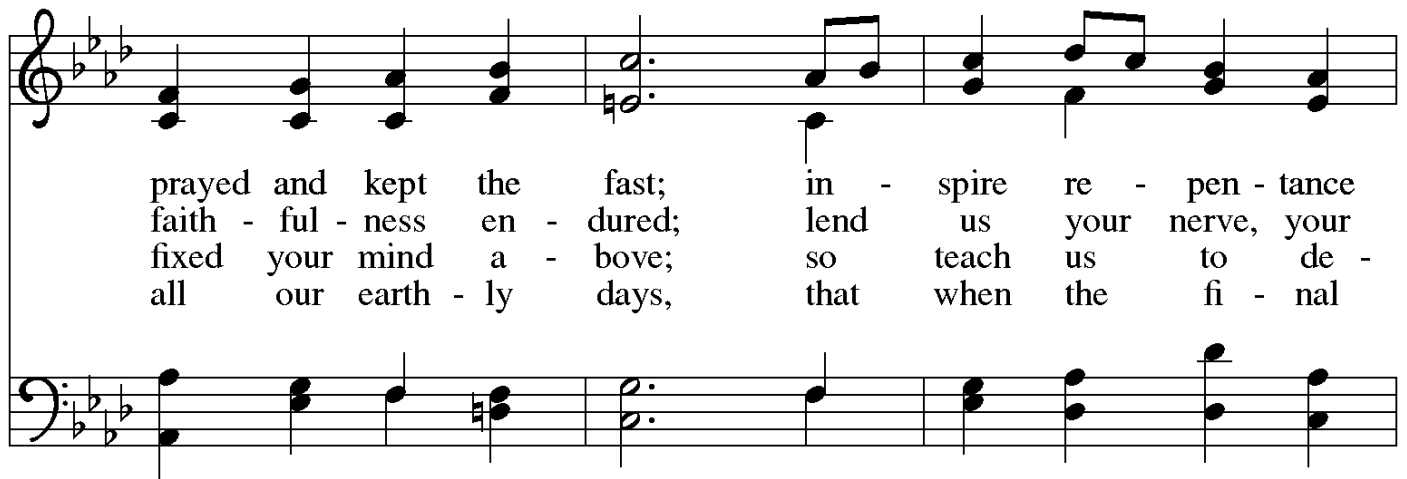
O Lord, Throughout These Forty Days

Stanzas 1, 3 & 4

ELW 319



1 O Lord, through - out these for - ty days you
2 You strove with Sa - tan, and you won; your
3 Though parched and hun - gry, yet you prayed and
4 Be with us through this sea - son, Lord, and



prayed and kept the fast; in - spire re - pen - tance
faith - ful - ness en - dured; lend us your nerve, your
fixed your mind a - bove; so teach us to de -
all our earth - ly days, that when the fi - nal



for our sin, and free us from our past.
skill and trust in God's e - ter - nal word.
ny our - selves that we may know God's love.
Eas - ter dawns, we join in heav - en's praise.

Text: based on Claudia F. Hernaman, 1838–1898; para. Gilbert E. Doan Jr., b. 1930
Music: CONSOLATION, A. Davisson, *Kentucky Harmony*, 1816; arr. Theodore A. Beck, 1929-2003
Text © 1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship*, admin. Augsburg Fortress.
Arr. © 1969 Concordia Publishing House.

Prayers of the Church

A: Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

A: In Jesus your realm has come near to us in every place and time. Give your church throughout the world a spirit of humility and repentance; teach us to trust always in the good news of your salvation. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: You have made a covenant of mercy with every living creature. Protect all the earth's creatures from destruction. Empower the work of biologists, conservationists, and science educators. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: All your paths are steadfast love and faithfulness. Direct the words and actions of leaders in our community and throughout the world, that they may maintain justice for the lowly. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: Even in the wilderness you are with us. Walk alongside migrants and refugees crossing dangerous lands. Tend to those whose lives feel desolate. Give healing and strength to all who suffer. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: In the covenant of baptism you claim us as beloved children. Nurture us in our baptismal identity and teach us to live within it for the sake of others. Strengthen this congregation's ministries of care and concern.

Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: For whom or what else do the people of God pray?

A silence is given so that your prayers may be offered.

A: Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

- A:** In baptism you join us to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
We praise you for all those who have died trusting in your faithfulness.
Bring us with them to the fullness of your reign. Lord, in your mercy,
- C:** **hear our prayer.**
- A:** We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- C:** **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

- P:** Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.
- C:** **Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread
and forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever.
Amen.**

Announcements

- P:** We thank you for joining us for this service. If you would like to hear other services or access the newest edition of *the Quill*, our newsletter, we invite you to go to our website at queenannelutheran.org.

P: Receive now the blessing:

Benediction

A: Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

P: Almighty God, the Father, † the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
bless and preserve you.

C: Amen.

Dismissal

P: Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Postlude

Fugue in G minor ("The Little")
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

About today's music

Hymn texts and tunes are separate entities that come together in different combinations across time and in different Christian worship traditions. In the majority of Christian hymnals, today's Hymn of the Day (ELW 319, "O Lord, Throughout These Forty Days") is used with the tune, ST FLAVIAN (see ELW 516 and www.hymnary.org). *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* uses the rural American tune, CONSOLATION, for this text. I wonder if this might be because CONSOLATION is strongly associated with the Advent hymn, "The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns," ELW 260. "The King Shall Come" foreshadows Lent and Easter, especially in stanza 3: "Oh, brighter than the rising morn / when Christ victorious, rose / and left the lonesome place of death, / despite the rage of foes." Perhaps the editors of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* wanted to create a connection between these texts from Advent to Lent by using this tune for both hymns.

—Cantor Kyle

