

GOD MOMENTS

I Lent – B February 18, 2018

Mark 1:9-15

This past Wednesday, Valentine’s Day and Ash Wednesday occurred together; and in an unlikely entanglement of the sacred with the secular, reminded us that the journey of Lent is a disciplined walk where God’s love takes on the world’s reality of sin and death and finds its completion in the cross of Jesus. There was a temptation to trace a heart of ashes with a cross at the center—which, when you think of Martin Luther’s seal—would have been a very Lutheran thing to do.



Sadly the day was profaned by the horrific school shooting that left 17 dead and many injured at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL. It was a sober reminder that the forces of evil are still very much at work. And traced on hearts across Florida, the nation, and the world was the ashen cross that reminds us of the brokenness of this world, our vulnerability, and our mortality.

We have begun the season of Lent, the forty-days (plus Sundays) that we journey toward Easter. Along the journey “we keep company with Noah and his family, who were in the ark for forty days; with the Hebrews, who journeyed through the desert for forty years; and with Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, who fasted for forty days before they embarked on the tasks God had prepared for them.” [*Bread for the Day 2018*, p. 57].

We join the journey today in our reading from Mark’s gospel. The writer reveals Jesus emerging from baptism by John, the heavens being ripped open, the voice proclaiming Jesus to be God’s own beloved Son, a Spirit—that doesn’t lead—but rather casts Jesus into the wilderness (biblical code for a time of testing); and the re-emergence of Jesus, ever more determined in his calling after hearing of John’s death. “The time is fulfilled,” is the way Jesus begins proclaiming *the good news* of God. “The time is fulfilled,” but this is not about the hour of the day (known in Greek as *chronos*, the chronological time); it is rather the space in time that is God’s time: *The God Moment* is here. (The Greek word for God Moment is *kairos*, the perfect time.) God’s kingdom, God’s reign over all, has come near: so near that it is in their midst. So near, that the people are witnessing it in Jesus.

Just as it did for the disciples and the crowds long ago, *The God Moment* reaches to us. It is time to open our eyes and tune our ears; it is time to repent and turn toward the good news. Even more, it is time to believe that good news is *for us*. The forces of darkness will continue to emerge, they will attempt to overpower the gospel; but they can never extinguish the true Light.

In Mark’s gospel we will hear one more time about fulfillment, the time when the Scriptures are being fulfilled [Mark 14:49], as Jesus will tell his friends, in those precious moments before he is arrested, condemned, and put to death. This, too is a *God Moment*; for in it the power of God will be revealed. It is the *God Moment* when everything will be fulfilled, as we will see at the end of the journey. And in a hearkening back to Noah, the flood, and the covenant promise; and recalling the emergence of Jesus from the River Jordan, our own washing will connect us so that we are forever sealed in the power and promise of the words: “You are my [Child], Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

The Cross of Christ that marks us forever, and the ashen cross that retraces the path of our baptism, mark us as God's own. They send us forth, washed in the water, purified in the ash that cleanses (even as it reminds us of our finiteness), so that we can be signs of God's reign drawn near, and the presence of God, up close and personal. We are church for these very reasons. And we are church in this place and this time—in this *God Moment* when discord shakes our foundations and violence again rears its ugly head. We are church for those who have been sorted and isolated into groups, and for all who feel lonely, left out, or trampled upon. God has come near: for them, for you, for me. Repent! Turn yourself around, see, and believe. Amen.