

## **First Sunday in Lent-February 18, 2024**

### **Introduction to the season and the day-**

As we follow Jesus, we eventually notice just how disruptive he is—spirit beings fear him, tempters try to distract him, religious leaders eventually collude with the empire to have him killed. During Lent we might ponder both how disruptive Jesus can be—Mark announces that Jesus is Son of God so we're left to wonder what God's end game is...and is the fact that God is about restoration disruptive to those who like things just as they are.

### **GOSPEL: Mark 1:9-15**

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."

### **SERMON**

Heavens rip open, the Spirit dive bombs Jesus and the Spirit then drives Jesus into the wilderness. Probably not coincidence that Mark the minimalist storyteller uses the same word for Jesus being driven to the wilderness as he uses for Jesus driving out and the evil spirits. It all adds up to God disrupting our schemes for the sake of restoring all creation.

There will be plenty of pushback...demons challenging and trying to call Jesus out....followers who think Jesus should rethink his game plan....religious leaders

who speculate whether Jesus is possessed by evil spirits....and an empire that doesn't need anybody critiquing them or offering an alternative way to live.

Aren't our lives bumpy enough without this type and level of disruption? Maybe Mark hides the Good News in plain sight...Jesus says in the here and now, God's rule and realm is among us. Another way of living is possible. We don't have to buy into the might makes right and accept that the poor become poorer because the rich get richer.

When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of living another way, like Jesus says, he liked to quote abolitionist Theodore Parker:

*I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends toward justice.*

The commentator at Working Preacher Dr. David Jacobsen (a classmate of mine from our undergrad days) believes Jesus calls us to be benders of that moral arc. I'd add that there are plenty of people who would rather twist it to their own advantage. Nevertheless.....

What if today's Gospel is a reminder that God is seeing to it that the moral arc of the universe does bend toward justice, and kindness and walking attentively before God?

What if God's plan is so audacious that God would liberate even the rich and powerful right along with the rest of us?

What if God's plan includes saving us from ourselves...or at from least the most destructive and inhumane parts of ourselves?

What if we hear Mark's words about the realm and ways of God come to earth paraphrased as Professor Jacobsen does... saying, "It's on now"

