



ST. MICHAEL'S SERMONS

Greenville, SC

Lent 1 – March 5, 2006

Mark 1:9 – 15

THROWN OUT

“Thrown Out!”

What did you think when you read that? Thrown out, like the garbage? Thrown out, like a bouncer would do it? Thrown out, like sour milk? Thrown out, like throwing out your back? Thrown out, like into the deep water? Thrown out, like the first pitch in baseball? Thrown out at second base, or at home plate? What did you think? And who was thrown out? You yourself? Or someone else?

In this morning's Gospel text, Jesus Himself is the one Thrown Out. Jesus has just been Baptized. He has seen the heavens torn apart, and the Spirit descending on Him. He has heard the Voice from heaven: “You are My Son, the Beloved!”

“And immediately,” Mark says, “the Spirit drives Him out into the wilderness!” The self-same Spirit of God's Own Holiness now drives Jesus – the word literally means “throws” – throws Jesus out! “Immediately the Spirit throws Jesus out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan.” Throws Jesus – with compelling force – like a Randy Johnson fastball; like a bouncer, with one hand on the collar and one hand on the belt; like a passionate person is driven by compelling force; like a baby is driven from the womb into the world by compelling force.

The word is exactly the same word Mark uses to describe exorcisms – and most of the exorcisms in the New Testament are, in fact, found in Mark's Gospel. Whenever Jesus casts out a demon or removes an unclean spirit, He “throws it out,” with compelling force. Just as He Himself is thrown by the Spirit with compelling force out – out into the wilderness – where Israel was, and learned to trust God; where the Church often is, learning and learning again and again to trust God – the place of temptation which tries us and tests us to our very core – and the place of revelation, where we come closer to God than we have ever been and understand in new ways God's grace and mercy, love and forgiveness for us.

The Spirit throws Jesus out into the wilderness. Far from being an unwilling victim or reluctant prophet, Jesus understands completely and has at His disposal, even in the wilderness, the compelling power of God to throw out, like a bouncer, every demonic demon and destructive disease and death itself which would destroy us. Thus, Jesus is able, by the compelling power of the same Holy Spirit, to resist the temptation to become more or to settle for less than God's call to Him; to exercise the power He has for selfish gain; to save His Own life. Thus, Jesus life becomes God's gift to us!

By the compelling power of His birth into our human existence, by the compelling power of His Baptism by water and the Spirit, by the same compelling power which enables Him to

exorcise demons, death and the devil – Jesus Christ is thrown out into the wilderness. And that’s the point of this sermon, the good news of this Lenten Gospel:

Jesus is thrown out, just as you and I are thrown out! Jesus is thrown out, and Jesus has thrown out all that would separate us from God!

We are thrown out, by birth into this broken world, and by Baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection – and Jesus has already thrown out all that would separate us from God!

Jesus is thrown out, and by His being thrown out is able to throw out all that separates us from God!

We are thrown out! And we are thrown out together – together with Christ, and together with each other!

God’s People need never be surprised to find themselves in the wilderness. (Read the Bible; it’s in there!) But God’s People need never be alone in the wilderness! We always have Christ. And we always have each other. It is the Church’s responsibility to give that gift to each other, to make sure no one is ever alone in the wilderness. And it’s not as complicated as it sounds: Penny takes candle stubs which would otherwise be thrown out, melts them and molds them into large candles which she gives as Baptism gifts, so that Emerson will always have the light of Christ in her life.

God’s People can expect to be in the wilderness; and we can expect to be there longer than we want to be. Forty days is a long time – long enough to span parts of three months; long enough for the seasons to change; long enough for plants to wither and die; long enough for plants to flower and set fruit. God’s People can expect to be in the wilderness, but God’s People should never expect to be alone in the wilderness! The best addiction counselors are recovering addicts. The best spiritual guide is one who has been through their own spiritual crisis. God’s People are never alone in the wilderness. We always have the Word of God, the presence of Christ, and each other.

The Jewish religious practice in the time of Jesus was such that, on the great Day of Atonement we know as Yom Kippur, the High Priest took a spotless and perfect lamb, placed both hands on it’s head, bore down with all his weight, and prayed the great prayer of atonement so that all the sins of all the people would go into this spotless and perfect lamb. The lamb was then driven out into the rocky Judean desert to die, and there would die also all the sins of all the people.

It is a measure of the bankruptcy of religious institutions that, in Jesus’ day, this high priest was none other than Caiaphas. It is a measure of God’s grace and mercy, love and forgiveness for us that now Christ is this spotless Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of all the world. This Lamb of God is still out there. And there, out there in the wilderness, we will meet Him . . . thrown out . . . for us . . .

AMEN