



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
2-26-12

*“My father could use a little mercy now
The fruits of his labor
Fall and rot slowly on the ground
His work is almost over
It won't be long and he won't be around
I love my father, and he could use a little mercy now.”*

So Jesus went into the wilderness and was tempted by Satan. For 40 days and 40 nights – or so we are told. And it happens right after the high moment of his baptism and the assurance of being a beloved son of God. We also hear this reading today because last week we remembered the wondrous moment of the transfiguration and God again pronouncing Jesus as a beloved son. And then Jesus comes down from that mountain and begins the journey into Jerusalem for the Passover feast and his crucifixion. In both cases – Jesus transitions from a moment of supreme assurance into a time of wandering and temptation.

So Satan comes and tempts Jesus – with food and power and miracles. And Jesus says no. He says no to being the super-hero, beyond and above the rest of us sort of person. He says no and he returns to us as a human. He returns to us as someone who will fully experience the impact of his decision to remain with us as one of us. He returns to us to face frustrations when his disciples whine, complain, and don't understand what he teaches. He returns to us and experiences anger at the abuses of power done by the authorities both in the religious community and outside of it. He returns to us and suffers when friends are arrested and die, when people betray or leave him. He returns to us and rages at the greediness of the money changers and other business practices. He returns to us and is bombarded with questions and requests and demands until his exhaustion leads him to prayer and solitude. He returns to us and lives as one of us – asking his Father for mercy for himself and for others.

*“My brother could use a little mercy now
He's a stranger to freedom
He's shackled to his fears and doubts
The pain he lives in is
Almost more than living will allow
I love my brother, and he could use a little mercy now.”*

Many of the parishioners/people attending the Confirmation classes this fall were surprised to learn that there are two services for a private confession included in our Book of Common Prayer. The services are called – The Reconciliation of a Penitent and are found starting on page 447. In the instructions given concerning the rite it says that confession can be heard anytime and anywhere. It says that the service has been committed by Christ to his Church as part of the care Christians have for each other. For me, the experience is one of absolute mercy.

In this season of Lent we are encouraged to take time for self-examination – to review or remember who we are and where we are and what habits and choices are directing our moments. We are also invited into a time of repentance and renewal – being encouraged to offer forgiveness to those we have hurt and to those who have led us to rage and anger.

There is a difference between our General Confession said each Sunday by all of us. Although I try to pause a few moments for silence, it is rarely enough time for any of us to think of what we are sorry for at that moment and to offer it to God. Rather, the General Confession binds us together as a community that recognizes our shortcomings and our need of God's forgiveness for all of us.

But the private confession of for an individual and offers to opportunity to be like Jesus and consider what tempts us, what causes us to suffer, what leads us to distraction, what embarrasses or shames us.

I speak today about the temptations of Christ because he experienced them similar to you and me. I seek to remind you today that Jesus also traveled a pathway that included frustrations and hard times. I wish you to think about moments when we can know ourselves as beloved and surrounded by the fullest mercy and love that can fill us and guide us and delight us no matter what journey we are now traveling.

*“Yeah, we all could use a little mercy now
I know we don't deserve it
But we need it anyhow
We hang in the balance
Dangle 'tween hell and hallowed ground
Every single one of us could use a little mercy now
Every single one of us could use a little mercy now.
Every single one of us could use a little mercy now.”*

Thanks be to God.