

The Gospel of Mark loves the word immediately. In cinemagraphic terms, it is full of cut transitions. There's no slow fade, we jump from scene to scene and this moment is doubly abrupt. Instead of holding to the glory of revelation in the moment of Baptism the spirit immediately drove him out in the wilderness. The Greek word used for what the spirit did to Jesus is the same word used when Jesus drives demons from people later in the Gospel. The spirit didn't suggest Jesus go to the wilderness, the spirit forced him, filled him with a conviction that he could do nothing other than this. He was driven, but the crowd didn't know why.

Jesus didn't leave his baptism to feed the poor or heal the sick, that came later. Jesus left with a purpose to confront evil. The very essence of evil, the devil. I doubt he walked in to the water thinking "After I do this, I'll run take on the master of evil." He was led by God to one thing and in that moment, the Spirit filled him with a purpose he could not deny and he took on a task that others would find overwhelming.

We've seen these people. People with a purpose so intense that it seems nothing will sway them. The world needs these people. We have them in this congregation, I've seen them. People dedicated to making sure the hungry in this community are fed. People dedicated to the children of this community. Those are just two, and I know there are many more.

We say of these people that they have a calling from God because the work they are doing is merciful and the dedication they show must surely be driven by the Holy Spirit. God needs this work done in the community. And if we are honest, we are often proud God has called those folks to do that work, because its just not our thing....

In some respects, those I've mentioned are doing the same. Hunger and poverty are just as much the work of evil in the world as the

temptations Jesus faced. To address those issues is to face the devil. To work on those issues can feel lonely, because not everyone has the zeal burning within them to work with “those people.”

Each of us has a calling. Many of them noble in the eyes of society, and others less sparkly, but no less important. There are people who work with youth sports, because they are called to do that. They see the impact it has on a young person. They provide a young person with an adult who cares about them. For those that do it for those reasons and not to relive the glory days or missed opportunities of their youth, those people are serving God just as well. Musicians, carpenters, even people who will just sit and listen to someone, they are following a calling from God when they are doing it to help others and show love.

And just as Jesus did. They get tired. All too often we see the burnout. We see people who would love someone else to take the burden, even for a short time, so that they can rest. But people say “I can’t imagine who would do that if you didn’t do it.” Well, honestly, that’s not helping. That’s adding to the burden, because now I’m letting all sort of people down.

When we read this story we focus on the battle with the devil. We envision ourselves facing the fears and challenges of this world and how we serve God by avoiding temptation. Those are the heroic roles. But today I think we need to think more about the supporting cast in the Gospel. For they are just as important.

When he was tired, the angels came and waited on him. They cared for him. They sustained him and reminded him that while, he might do the work, he wasn’t alone. God had sent support to help him regain strength and renew his purpose. Those are the roles we can all focus on. Not all of us are called to face Satan down eye to eye. But we are all called to love our neighbor.

My undergraduate school, Berry College, has Jesus' words from Mark chapter 10 as its motto. Not to be ministered unto, but to minister. That is our calling just as much as when the spirit drives some of us to face great evil, the spirit drives others to serve those tired from the battle. And often times we don't even know we are doing it.

A smile to someone we don't know, could be the angel who says "I acknowledge your humanity when no one else seems to." Pausing for an answer to the oft said question "How are you" because you really mean it. Serving, ministering, or waiting on someone doesn't always involve a casserole (but that's not bad...) but it does mean letting someone know that they have been recognized as a child of God.

We recognize the battles people are fighting when it is someone who is fighting outward evil like hunger, poverty, or the like. But we can't forget that each one of us is fighting battles internally as well. The emotional challenges that make us question our value to others or ourselves, that have us wondering if we should really be doing the work we are doing, or will anyone ever hire me to do any work. It is easy to see how someone is tired fighting the demons outside ourselves, but the ones inside ourselves may often be stronger and more challenging, because we can never walk away from them.

The angels are just as much an important part of this story and they get tossed away at the end of a sentence in Mark, because the writer wants to hit the action sequences.

We should take a moment and be thankful for the angels among us. And the best part of that is that someone probably thinks you are an angel to them and you would be stunned to know that. I know I've felt that way.

God provides comfort, care, and rejuvenation. We have to be open to receiving it and be open to providing it. Jesus faced the Devil in the wilderness and won, Jesus defeated death on the cross. While we've not done those things we need the care of the angels among us now more than ever.

Prayers of Intercession

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

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

A brief silence.

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. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You have made a covenant of mercy with every living creature. Protect all the earth's creatures from destruction (*especially . . . here local environmental concerns may be named*). Empower the work of biologists, conservationists, and science educators. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

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. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

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 (*especially*). Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

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 (*especially*). Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

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. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.