

The First Sunday in Lent
February 18, 2018

Text: Mark 1:9-15
Theme: "A Busy Time?"

Are you busy? I'm pretty sure you have asked and been asked that question. One who asks it has something with which he wants to busy the one being asked. He is seeking time for consideration. The reason for asking is beyond curiosity. Often the one being asked is busy, but in your response you try not to come off as short or stressed. Even if you are busy and don't have the time, you try to answer in a way that shows a willingness to consider the request being made, if not now, then later.

Here we are on February 18, 2018. How did it get to be 2018 so soon? Wasn't it just 2008, or 1998, or 1988? Where did all the time go? Has it all just been busied away? Years do have a way of accumulating. Often our thoughts are not on the accumulated years on which we stand, but the days, weeks, or months that are just up ahead. We see the needs and to do's accumulating and piling up. This in turn can lead to an accumulation of uneasiness or worry.

So are you busy? Well, yes. We are busy. But it's not just us. With what are we busy on this February 18 of 2018 on this First Sunday in Lent? What is the aim, what is the purpose, what is the goal of all this busy?

If we want to know how busy we are, all we have to do is reach in our pocket and pull out our busy box, our phone. Are you busy? Let me check this. Everything can be in here, all your appointments, upcoming

flights or hotel reservations. In here you can find anniversaries and birthdays. You may have a lot of alerts that come across your screen and accompanying beeps, bells, or horns. These let you know a busy moment has arrived.

On our phones we are apt to have apps for many different things. You don't have to listen for the rain or look out the window, you just pull up the radar to see if it's raining. You can do your banking, check the stock market, keep track of your diet and exercise. If some random question pops into your mind you can instantly research it. There are emails and texts, constant contact. If you are not careful you can live more in your phone than in the space and with the people right around you. You can even make and receive phone calls on these things.

Yes, we may be very busy and our busy boxes can help us keep track of it all. There are work and school events, routine and special events. There may be a trip or a project. Spring Break is coming up next month. Does that bring a different kind of busy? Then there are busy busters. Busy busters interrupt our scheduled busy with unplanned events. Busy busters come in the form of sickness, or accidents, or arguments, maybe alien abductions. They are not even in our phone and yet they happen.

What busy lies before you the next 35 days? There are 40 days of Lent beginning on Ash Wednesday. We are already on day 5. Between now and Easter, April 1, this year, what will you encounter on the path before you?

It was a busy time for Jesus. There is a lot of activity packed into the seven verses of our text. Jesus comes down from Nazareth and is baptized by John. This is quite the event. The heavens open, the Spirit comes down as a dove into Jesus and there is the voice from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (vs 11) Then Jesus is driven by the Spirit out into the wilderness. He has an appointment with the devil.

He is in the wilderness for 40 days being tempted by the devil. Mark tells us no more. We learn more specifics from Matthew and Luke. From them we learn of three temptations. So Jesus is tempted, but there’s more. He is with the wild beasts (vs 13). This is most likely part of the description of His trials in the wilderness. This is not a return to Eden. These are critters that would do you harm. But there is still more. “And the angels were ministering to Him” (vs 13)

Now the action changes again. Jesus has been baptized, faced Satan, and now it’s time to begin preaching. And He does. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the Gospel.” (vs 15) People were ready for, waiting for the Kingdom of God. In the thoughts of many, maybe most, that kingdom would be centered in Jerusalem. It would involve the club and the sword. God would execute judgment on the nations. The club and the sword of the Son of David in Jerusalem would dish out God’s wrath. Certainly there was room for personal repentance for many within Israel, but in the big scheme of things the big club and the big sword was for the nations. That’s what the devil needed also, needed to be on the receiving end of the club and the sword.

Yes, many were looking for the sword and the club, the judgment. John the Baptist certainly spoke of coming judgment. He did indeed speak of repentance needed to escape such coming judgment. Many did repent, were baptized for forgiveness, and surely some were looking for the right kind of kingdom or at least the right King, but for most, the apostles of Jesus included, they were still infected with restoration fever, the restoration and expansion of the kingdom of David.

Yes, it was a busy time for Jesus and through feverish eyes there seemed to be a good progression. Jesus spoke with great authority. There was healing after healing after healing. Great crowds gathered. Yes, there was rising friction as the preaching, teaching, and healing by Jesus continued. Jesus was rubbing the Jewish leadership the wrong way, tensions were rising, and some sparks were flying. Yet, Jesus continued. His march to Jerusalem would not be stopped. He spoke of it Himself.

Jesus' followers were quite hopeful. The closer He came to Jerusalem was it the higher the hopes? Certainly the closer He came arguments about who would the closest arose, who would even be at His right and His left when He came into His glory arose (Mark 10:35-37). Would the enemies soon feel the club and the sword? And then it is Jerusalem. Jesus enters as the long awaited for Son of David (which He was, but not in the form most supposed). There are the crowds, the palms, and the praises. There are also rising tensions. There is uneasiness, I would think, among His followers, but maybe also hope. Yes, tensions, but soon everything would snap, break loose, and Jesus would triumph.

Things did snap and break, but it was not the triumph they envisioned. “And Immediately, while He was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.” (Mark 14:43) And it was all downhill from there. Yes, their dream were busted with swords and clubs.

Our dreams and plans can also be busted. There are such things as strained relationships, broken relationships, broken health, or just broke financially. Family life is not as idyllic as we hoped. There is friction with children, too many demands at the workplace that take you away. There is great anguish of family members walking away from the faith, and those who show little interest as they are more busy with the desires of this present life.

And then there is temptation, a big problem indeed. Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, yet without sin. James speaks of the lure of temptation in our epistle lesson, the pull of sinful desires. The beast says the path God says not to go down, well, that’s the one for you! Maybe we take a step or two and it will not be so terrible, see what we are up against and still pull back. That’s not the way it works. James says when desire is conceived it gives birth to sin, and grown up sin gives way to death (James 1:14, 15). Busted, busted by the club of sin and the piercing sword of the law.

Many of the dreams about the Messiah was busted, but God’s plan was not. Look who is in the water at the Jordan. John’s baptism was one of repentance of the forgiveness of sins. This One had no sin, yet He goes

down into that water for sinners, that water that many of the day thought they were too clean to enter. This One is the Holy One of God. This One is the Divine Son. This One is God. The Father affirms Him as He comes up out of the water.

This is the One who is with the beasts. The Spirit drives Him out to the place of deprivation, the place of danger, the place of testing. There He meets the beast, even the roaring lion, the one who rebelled against God now hoped to entangle God's Son. The last time he tempted one without sin he had been successful. He was looking to go two for two or three for three. But he fails, fails miserably.

The beast will be conquered. The word that is translated "wild animal here in verse 13, *qhri, on, therion*, is used 46 times in the NT. Fourteen of those 46 occurrences, almost a third are in one chapter of the Bible, Revelation 13. There the beastiest beast of all, the old serpent, the dragon, roaring as he knows his time is short, uses everything at his disposal to make war on those who hold to the testimony of Jesus. In Revelation 13 he works through two beasts. The more terrible looking of the two is the powers of this world working against the church. The second, which had some resemblance to a lamb, is the antichrist, or false ones or false one who speak from within the church but speak lies, distorts the truth to lead astray and away from the Lamb. The beast means to devour, chew up, and swallow down for all eternity.

But the Lamb conquers. In Revelation Jesus is depicted as having a sharp two edged sword coming from His mouth and ruling with a rod of

iron. (1:16, 19:15) But look how He overcomes in our text today. He doesn't take the bait in the wilderness. He does use the sword, the Word of God. With it He cuts through the deception to reveal God's path. He answers, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God," "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test," "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve." (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10) He pierces through the fog of doubt.

The Father does provide for Jesus. Jesus will not be provoked to show off power at Satan's dare, no stones to bread, and no taking a high dive off the temple to test the angels. But God does send angels in His time. They minister to Jesus. They supply His need.

Jesus conquers by obedience. He subjects Himself to those who come with the clubs and the swords, and to those with the scourge, and the thorns, the nails and the cross. He is obedient the will of the Father, obedient unto death, even death on the cross. He takes the club and the sword right out of the devil's hand, the club of threats and the sword of despair. He has nothing to threaten us with a Jesus has taken all the justice of sin and faced the despair of being forsaken by the Father in time that we be might with Him in eternity. Jesus is the Beast Buster.

We are blessed by God's goodness. He supplies all we need for this body and life and He supplies what is needed for eternal life as we have the forgiveness won by our Lord Jesus, our crucified, dead and buried, but risen, ascended, reigning, interceding Jesus.

We are here as God's servants. There is purpose in our busy as we are doing God's bidding and God's business. Our serving is not to get in good with God, but for the good of those around us—our brothers and sisters in Christ, our family, our neighbors, our co-workers and classmates.

In Christ we go to serve as conquerors of the beast. “The accuser of our brothers has been thrown down...and they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, for they had not loved their lives even unto death.” (Revelation 12:10, 10). Yes, we are busy, busy in faithfulness to the Faithful One. For Jesus' sake. Amen