

## The Eighth Day

Wayne Waibel – 02/18/2024

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.” We go from the margins to “the kingdom of God is at hand” in six verses. Mark does everything quickly in his gospel.

The Lenten season is upon us now. We shift from the expectations of Advent leading up to Christmas - to the sacrifices of Lent, culminating in Easter. This can be a very confusing time for someone who is new to the protestant faith. What does suffering have to do with Easter – rather what does our personal sacrifice have to do with Easter?

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When we talk about sacrifice and suffering, it’s easy to be confused. There are so many religious practices that use this time of year to enforce a type of discipline that reflects the temptations of Christ in the wilderness. And the confusion begins with the word “repent.”

The first proclamation of Jesus after the heavens tear apart and the Spirit descends upon and into Him, and then drives Him into the wilderness is, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." We easily interpret that to mean "suffer and sacrifice" - when the word more accurately translates to "surrender and turn toward God."

There are any number of penitent practices from denying yourself meat to engaging in the self-mutilation customs of some not-so-third world cultures. While I would neither judge those traditions nor try to minimize the profound impact they may very well have on the practitioner, I do not believe it is a tradition that God would require of us.

God Himself relented after the great flood. It was a sign that God changed (and is changing). And even though we tend to make suffering a spiritual discipline, particularly during the season of Lent, we know it to be not something simply endured, but embraced.

Sometimes human suffering exceeds our capacity to comprehend and respond, but to surrender and turn toward God is a repentance that lends itself to a deeper understanding of and belief in the gospel.

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It is difficult indeed to absorb the conditions of our current age from the margins and remain hopeful. How can we in our time ponder the wilderness experience of Jesus in His time and arrive at a peace?

It may be helpful to remember that the inbreaking of God's reign was designed to restore creation to the state at which God pronounced it "Good." Peace, therefore, is implied.

We must maintain the capacity to reorient our worldview toward God. In so doing, we become better and better able to overcome the drama of chaotic distractions that serve only to confuse, alienate, and subvert.

This broken world of ours has been in a state of progression toward "thy kingdom come" for more than two millennia now. The evidence is there. The evidence is here. "The kingdom of God is at hand."

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It is in God's nature to create. It is also in God's nature to save. Lent is a journey to that side of God. He seeks us out and speaks to us from the margins. Jesus breaks into His divine role from the margins. We wander into the reign of God from the margins.

When Christ is filled from above with the Holy Spirit, He is then driven to the margins, the wilderness – where he will stand alone and apart from human interaction. It is His time of preparation for the mission and the ministry that will lead to the cross.

Mark does not dwell on this episode in the life of Christ. He has an urgent message to convey. “The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent – and believe in the gospel.” That message could be translated to say, “Re-focus and trust the good news,”

It was an extremely dangerous world then. The wilderness is a little different in today’s world, but it remains very dangerous to this day. Fortunately – Jesus does all the heavy lifting. He is the one that will go toe to toe with an empire that will seek to kill Him as He proclaims the good news of the reign of God.

And He makes this proclamation to the poor – the disenfranchised – the outcasts. The good news is for all – especially those on the fringes of society. Good news indeed.

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And so, we circle back to Lent, with its march up to Good Friday and the entire point embodied in being an Easter people. We believe in eternal life, made possible through the sacrifice of our Lord. A single man whose life became a ransom for many.

At the front end of this march, we are reminded that God has changed and is ever changing – as witnessed in His first covenant with humankind. It doesn't matter that humanity at that time consisted of eight souls. What mattered was that His very first covenant was a promise of what He would not do – ever again.

Because He had changed from a God that saw human treachery and rose to snuff it out, to a God that would sacrifice His only Son to restore creation to a state that would allow Him once again to proclaim with utter certainty - "that it was good." And an evening and a morning were the eighth day... Amen.