

## First Sunday in Lent (2018)

**Mark 1:9–15** In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” *The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.*

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

In the Name of Jesus.

‘Good and upright is the LORD; therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble in his way.’ (Psalm 25)

Happy Day! Baptismal Remembrance all around!

For whatever in the world this GOSPEL of Jesus

Christ the Son of God is—and Whoever HE is!—the CRIMES start piling up today that will FILL the indictment against Him on that terrible Day:

Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” And Jesus said, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” And the high priest tore his garments and said, “What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?” And they all condemned him as deserving death. And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophesy!” And the guards received him with blows.

That, from the BEST people the world’s ever known.  
Now, the WORST:

Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. And he answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again

said to them, “Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” And they cried out again, “Crucify him.” And Pilate said to them, “Why? What evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him.” So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

Why?! What hath my Lord done? What makes this rage and spite? He made the lame to run, He gave the blind their sight. SWEET INJURIES! Yet, they, at these, themselves displease; and ‘gainst Him rise.

Oh! He did much WORSE than make the lame run and the blind see! He LAMED those who RUN this world; and He BLINDED those whose eyes are everywhere!

And even your poor pastor is now certain of his good standing with his God!

For I, and you, and all: we have a King! And I mean that word ‘have.’ HE has so THROWN HIMSELF into the Jordan, the Spirit so DROVE Him into the wilderness, into temptation, into danger, into the Satan’s web—that He has overturned ALL that the good and the bad of this world figure is how things are run: from the TOP down!

And, instead, 'He is a Servant, I a Lord!'

And the KING of the Kingdom of God has  
SUBJECTED Himself to His subjects. To you; to me; to  
those Psalm 25 calls the humble, the oppressed, the sinners.  
God says all is right in heaven and on earth, when HE is in  
the whole messy mix of things with us, teaching and  
correcting and righting and encouraging; in a word,  
FORGIVING us!

How does the great Buck Owens used to sing?

Well I hope you'll come and see me in the movies  
Then I know that you will plainly see  
The biggest fool that ever hit the big time  
And all I gotta do is act naturally.

THOSE are the ones for whom He came!

Simon's mother-in-law is sick: His hand touches and  
heals.

The demon's have thrown saddles on poor men; He  
knocks them off and begins to ride us.

The disciples fuss over which of them is greatest; He turns over greatness into service and first place into last, last into first.

And what I'm always drawn to is toward the end of the Gospel according to Saint Mark; when He comes down the Mount of Transfiguration, and so RUDELY tells a man that his boy CAN be healed, if ONLY that man would have 'believing' going on. The man who came to Jesus; the man who came to the DISCIPLES, to whom Jesus had given His authority. THAT MAN needs more 'BELIEVING' going on? No! No! He won't stand for it; and neither must you! YOUR...KING...WORKS...FOR...YOU!

'LORD, I got all the believing any man could ever muster up and show. Now, here's what we're gonna do! Let's say that I DO NOT have any BELIEVING going on, oriented toward you, the disciples, God above, anyone: and you're gonna help me anyway! Lord, I do believe; so move on, and give aid to my UNBELIEF!'

Simple, my dear ones! Couldn't be simpler!

'All I gotta do is act naturally!'

There is ONLY...ONE...THING that can go wrong in this world, in our lives, my friends! Just one! And that is when any man takes it in hand to IMPROVE upon God!

Under Moses, that is making PROGRESS on love toward God and attachment to others: and you end up trying to clap with one hand, grasping smoke, putting your elbow in your ear. LOVE is the WORK that OTHERS receive FROM...YOU! When we make PROGRESS on that scheme, and LOVE-----OURSELVES?!! Heaven is closed to us; and so is everyone else.

But now, under Jesus, the NEW Kingdom, the NEW covenant, the NEW testament in His Blood, there is only one IMPROVEMENT on the Gospel we can make: and that is to turn Christ back into a Lawgiver, God back into Angry with the world, and MEN—us and others!—from those God SERVES, into those on whom God still waits to make Him glad.

Happy Day!

The Baptism of Christ, His temptation, His fasting, His cross, His rising, and the Sending of His Spirit—it's all stanza after stanza of Happy News and blessing; telling us that OUR PART is what Saint Owens sang to the world:

## ACT NATURALLY!

I watched a dear lady hand a close friend of mine a huge slice of chocolate cake; the LAST thing my chubby friend needed on that day. His response? ‘Oh! I can resist ANYTHING—except TEMPTATION!’

Act naturally, my dear Christians!  
LIVE...IN...THE...PLEDGE from God FROM your  
Baptism!

YOU can no more overcome temptation than I can, or my friend with his mouth stuffed with chocolate. And there’s only one thing worse we can do that GIVE IN to temptation, without even trying! And that is to DELUDE ourselves into thinking that WE are in the saddle, and Satan is our pony!

Or, my dear ones: to expect that from the next man!

So, the poor man, the poor woman, whom you fall asleep grumbling over, wake up ready to grumble over:

THERE...IS...NOTHING...UNNATURAL...ABOUT...HIM, her, them; or YOU!

But RIGHT THERE, IN temptation—is where Christ REIGNS!

Tell Him! Enlist Him! RULE Him!

I'll tell you, my friends: your poor pastor is DONE running from temptation. Oh, like the two-year-old, who puts on a belt of plastic tools, while dad is hammering and sawing in the shop—I will HELP God, Jesus, the Spirit; OFFER to help!

And just like that fine Father that He is, He beams with pride and says, 'You are a good HELPER, Paul!' And then He does all the real work.

At your temptation point—meaning, ALL...THE...TIME!—RULE The Spirit Who has begged a home with you! And order HIM to defeat Satan; and to send you angels to serve and comfort you—EVEN though HE does all the hard work!

And when the next man acts naturally—and sins—and

falls for temptation—

RULE the King!

BE reconciled to God!

The stupid are here to teach; sinners are here to  
pardon; bruises are here to soothe; demons are here to cast  
out;

And Christ came, comes, WILL come again:

Because He's got nothing better to do than to be our  
Savior!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the  
Holy Spirit! Amen!