

The Rev. Carmen Germino  
Sermon for the First Sunday in Lent  
February 18, 2018  
Mark 1:9-15

**In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."**

*Gracious Lord, uphold thou me, that I might uplift thee,  
in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Like many of you, I read the profiles of the victims  
of this week's shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.  
It seems that I have become so desensitized  
to the news of another mass shooting  
that I usually feel numb before I manage to feel any sadness or anger,  
and there's something very disturbing about that numbness.  
I know it is a coping mechanism, but this sort of violence  
is not something I want to learn to cope with, or ever get accustomed to.  
So to combat the numbness, I make myself take some time  
and pray for each victim by name, and for their families.  
I do it for them, of course, because I believe  
in the power of prayer to comfort and heal,  
but I also do it for me, in hopes that this prayer process  
will snap me out of any emotional detachment I may be experiencing.  
And so on Thursday, when the names of the victims were released,  
I made my way down the list of seventeen,  
reading about the heroic football coach and all the rest.  
I paused near the end when I got to one name.  
Carmen Schentrup, age 16.  
I suppose she stood out to me because we shared a first name.  
It wasn't until yesterday that I learned we shared more than that.  
We also shared a faith, and some mutual friends.  
Carmen was an Episcopalian.  
She was a leader of the youth group at her church,  
St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church in Coral Springs, Florida,

and she sang in the youth choir there as well.  
And it's a small, small world within the Episcopal Church.  
It turns out that the rector of Carmen's church  
happens to be married to a woman named Gail Haldeman,  
who was my roommate for a week at Our Little Roses Home for Girls  
during the Honduras Mission a few summers back.  
Gail lives in Florida but has become very involved in Our Little Roses,  
doing fundraising and visiting often.  
Gail and our own Julie Wade met in Honduras and became good friends,  
and so Gail started joining the St. James's mission trips.  
Many of us from St. James's have gotten to know and love Gail and her family.  
Gail cares deeply for all the girls at the home.  
Her ministry in Honduras has been an inspiration to me.  
Now she and her husband, the Rev. Canon Mark Sims,  
find themselves ministering to a community reeling  
from the carnage of this past Wednesday.  
Seven members of their church's youth group attend Stoneman Douglas High,  
And one of those seven teenagers, Carmen, is gone forever.  
While we would feel saddened and outraged by the shooting regardless,  
this personal connection drives home the reality that  
this tragedy is not some distant misfortune that has nothing to do with us.  
Gail and Father Mark have reached out to St. James's specifically  
and asked us to pray for their parish family as they grieve and process the horror  
of senseless violence that has taken Carmen's life and the lives of sixteen others.  
And so it falls to me to share this connection with you all,  
and ask you to pray for our friends in Florida  
as they are thrust into the wilderness of grief and pain.  
This was not the sermon I planned to preach today  
and it is not the one I want to preach,  
but on Wednesday morning, the people in Parkland woke up  
not knowing they were headed for the wilderness.  
Some of them were headed to school, and some were headed to work,  
and some were headed to church for Ash Wednesday services,  
But none of them had any idea they would end up  
in the wilderness of grief later that afternoon,  
but before they knew it, the landscape around them changed,  
and they found themselves in the unfamiliar territory of wilderness.

Now, I do not believe it is my job to tell you  
how to solve our nation's gun violence problem.  
And even if it were, it likely wouldn't do much good  
because your mind is probably made up already.  
Just as I have my opinions, you each surely have yours.

And my guess is we're all right, because this issue  
is multifaceted and requires change and action on many fronts.  
But my job today is to proclaim the Gospel.  
And it just so happens that today, our Gospel message  
takes us right on into the wilderness too.

Immediately after his Baptism, we are told that Jesus  
is driven into the wilderness for forty days by the Holy Spirit.  
There, we are told, he comes face to face with evil,  
as Satan tries to lure him away from his ministry.  
The presence of Satan in the story today makes us come to grips  
with the reality of evil in our world.

I know you don't hear a lot of Episcopal sermons about Satan,  
but you are getting one today, because he is real, as evil personified.  
Satan and evil showed up in Jesus's wilderness,  
And if this past week has taught us anything,  
we cannot escape the truth that evil shows up in our wilderness too.  
Evil is real, and it is powerful.

Just last week when I baptized some darling babies in this very room,  
I asked their parents and godparents to acknowledge and renounce Satan  
and all the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God.  
That was not an empty or meaningless question.  
Jesus had to wrestle with evil in the wilderness, and so do we.  
So what can Jesus's confrontation with Satan in the wilderness teach us?

Because Mark's description of Jesus's time in the wilderness  
is so brief, we are left to use our imaginations  
to envision what those 40 days were like.  
Physically, the wilderness of the Judean desert is stark, dry, desolate.  
There's a fearful peace about it, and while it is not a comfortable place to be,  
there is beauty, and the potential for intimacy with God.  
The wilderness is not a place we would usually choose to go,  
but sooner or later we will all find ourselves there.  
You have had your own wilderness experiences,  
or if you have not, you will.  
There is no route to get from birth to death,  
from Baptism to Resurrection,  
from the Jordan river to the city of Jerusalem.  
that does not take us through some wilderness,  
where we will surely come face to face with evil.  
As one of your priests, I know that some of you  
have had intensely difficult wilderness experiences of your own.  
You didn't choose these wilderness experiences,

and you don't deserve them.  
But they happened to you anyway,  
and the only real way out is through.

Jesus knew that.

While Jesus is in his wilderness, he is preparing himself for his ministry.

It is a hard and scary time, but when he emerges, he is ready.

Satan may be powerful, but Jesus is more powerful.

And the very first message that he proclaims after leaving the wilderness  
is the message we all desperately need to hear and abide by today.

In fact, it's the very first thing he says in Mark's entire Gospel,  
so we probably ought to pay attention.

He says, "Repent."

In the Greek, the word 'repent' is *metanoia*,  
and it literally means to turn around and go the other way,  
to change course, to stop stumbling down a dangerous and sinful path,  
and to do things differently from now on.

For Jesus, repentance is the message  
that immediately follows his time in the wilderness,  
and it is his message for us today as well.

As individuals, all of us have a need to repent.

And we can also must practice repentance as a society.

And now is the time.

The forty days of Lent began with ashes,  
a symbol of our mortality and brokenness.

On Ash Wednesday, the words of our prayer book invited us  
to observe "a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance..."

For the next six weeks, we will walk with Jesus as he journeys to the cross.  
And it's time for some self-examination and repentance.

I wish today's Gospel lesson was the only time  
Jesus had to be confronted with evil.  
But we know that's not the case.  
In fact, he will meet evil again just about everywhere he goes.  
Sometimes in the form of a demon or spirit,  
and sometimes in the form of good people who make bad choices.  
It's the latter category that will ultimately end up killing him.  
On this first Sunday in Lent, we must resolve  
to try not to be the good people who make bad choices.  
And so we are called to repent, to change course.  
I'm not here to tell you how to do it,  
But I am here to tell you that something must be done.  
Repentance, in the true sense of the word, must be done

because lives are at stake.

We must course-correct if we want to stop this madness.

My clergy colleagues and I are not your policy-makers  
but we are your spiritual guides and your moral leaders.

And so it falls to us to call the church to repentance.

This Lent, it is time to repent. It is past time.

I am not telling you what to do,

But I am urging you to do something proactive, for the love of God.

Literally, for the love of God.

And for the love of God's children

in every school, theater, and church.

And for Carmen and her church family in Florida,

and all of those affected by gun violence.

Catholic deacon Greg Kandra writes that, "Satan is absence. The absence of faith. The absence of responsibility. The absence of empathy. He is the voice that whispers, 'Someone else will solve it. It's not your problem. Move on. Forget it.'"

Friends, Lent is here and evil is real,

but we must not allow Satan to have the final word.

So heed the words of our Lord Jesus after his time in the wilderness:

**"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;**

**repent, and believe in the good news."**

**Amen.**