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Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness,
and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:
give us the grace to discipline ourselves
in obedience to your Spirit;
and, as you know our weakness,
so may we know your power to save

Our text may be found in today's gospel – Mark chapter 1 and verse 15:

'Repent and believe.'

And so to Lent. There were seventeen people in church on Ash Wednesday including two children, the young granddaughters of Tristan and Odile de Champchesnel. Now, today, the First Sunday in Lent, we have started our forty day Lenten journey to Easter.

There are four gospels, each good and different in their own way, and, this year, most of our gospel readings, on a Sunday, are to be found in Mark. What I love about Mark is his brevity, his succinct style. Possibly, the son of the owners of the Upper Room where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper, possibly the young lad who fled naked from the Garden of Gethsemane the night of Jesus' arrest, Mark was a cousin of Barnabas, a companion of Paul and possibly the recorder of Peter's

memories in the gospel he wrote. Mark's gospel was probably the first of our four gospels to be written. And today's reading – just seven verses – succinctly records Jesus' baptism, his temptation in the wilderness and the start of his public ministry.

In three verses, we hear that Jesus came to be baptised by John the Baptist in the river Jordan and as Jesus was coming up out the water, the Holy Spirit in the form a dove descended from heaven to alight on him and Jesus heard the voice of God. No mention of John's reluctance to baptise his cousin but where Mark really differs from Matthew's account is the voice of God speaks directly to Jesus: **'You are my son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'**

In two verses, we hear a succinct summary of Jesus' forty days in the Wilderness. Spirit-led, Jesus is there tempted by Satan. No mention of the three temptations that we hear of in Matthew and Luke. But two interesting details: one, that Jesus was in the company of wild animals; the other, that he was in the care of angels. The former points to a prelapsarian state of good order that Isaiah promises will be true again in the golden age to come when the lion will lie down alongside the lamb. The latter is a reminder of the positive ministry of angels that is a part of the good order of God's world.

And in two verses, the start of his ministry. Cousin John has been arrested and Jesus fills the gap by proclaiming the good news and calling on people to repent and believe. John the Baptist's call to the people was to repent and be baptised as a sign of a fresh new beginning. Jesus call is to repent and to believe the good

news: that a real living relationship with God is possible through belief in what he has to say about how to access the coming Kingdom of God. Just two key words in today's three word text 'Repent and believe.' To repent is to admit our guilt, our wrong doing, our wrong headedness, wrong in thought and word and deed. To repent is to say sorry for so doing. Repent is to be determined to try to be better in the future. Believe is to hold something to be true. Belief for us as Christians is a recognition that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God and that through belief in him, in what he taught, we can, by the grace of God, be saved and that when we die, as die we all must, there is the real possibility of life after death, resurrection from the dead and the life of the world to come.

So let me say again what I love about Mark's gospel: it's short and to the point; succinct and full of meaning. And let me leave you with Mark's challenge to us all in this God-forsaken, politically correct age in which we live: 'Repent and believe.'

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

For the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

18th February, 2018

G: Sermons 37 : More or less

