

Matthew 4:1-11

March 5, 2017

-I want to start with an exercise in thinking outside the box

-what is Jesus' mission?

-why did he come?

-he came to die on the cross ... to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world

-yes, but that's just a means to get to something greater, something more important

-he came to die on the cross and to rise again

-that's just more means to an end

-you have to think even bigger than that

-if you look at today's gospel, Jesus came to take on the devil

-he was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet without sin

-he came to win the battle we could never win

-he came to overcome sin and death and the power of the devil

-that's all true, but you're still not thinking big enough

-what is his "ultimate goal"?

-let me try something different

-if you grew up in the church, and especially if you grew up in the Lutheran Church, you have said or sung or listened to this phrase ten thousand times ... *"Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen"*

- that phrase is, at the same time both familiar and enigmatic
 - you have said it and sung it and heard it again and again, but can you answer that most basic of faith questions, “What does this mean?”
- tell me ... how was it “in the beginning”?
 - how is it now?
 - and ... how will it be forever?
- “in the beginning” would take us back to Genesis 2 and 3, before the fall into sin
 - in the beginning, everything was very good
 - in the beginning, Adam and Eve lived in perfect fellowship with God and with each other
 - in the beginning, it was paradise
- how will it one day be again in that future place? ...Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

- Isaiah even foretold the wonder of that future world (25:6-8)

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples, a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

- ok, so we sort of know how it was in the beginning, and we sort of know what it will be like in the future
 - as it was in the beginning ever shall be ... but how is it now?
 - at first glance, everything is kind of a mess

- let's go back to our first question ... what is Jesus' mission and why did he come?
 - John the Baptist said it when he first came on the scene
 - repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand
 - Jesus himself repeated those same words ... the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, has come
 - it is here, it is in your midst

- in a bible class not long ago we looked at the first miracle Jesus did in Cana, in Galilee ... it was water to wine at the wedding in John 2
 - did you ever stop to wonder whether that was an appropriate first miracle?
 - Jesus comes into a world filled with sickness and death, war and despair, hunger and every manner of suffering
 - all the result of sin
 - people were paralyzed, lame, blind, and deaf

- people were demon possessed, oppressed, enslaved
- widows were burying their children
 - and Jesus goes to a wedding and when the wine runs out and the bar closes, he makes it all right again?

-how is that of any real significance?

-here's how ...

-Genesis 3 ... how was it before sin entered the world?

-it was very good

-Adam and Eve and God ... it was the perfect trinity relationship and a reflection of God himself ... Father, Son and Holy Spirit

-there in the garden was the perfect marriage, and a wedding feast that would never end

-but it did end

-it came to an abrupt end when Adam and Eve sinned

-in essence, the party was over, the bar was closed, the wine ran out

-Paul puts it this way ... Romans 5:12-14 ... *“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses”*

-in John 2 as the curtain rises on Jesus' ministry, what does he do?

-he turns water into wine ... the wedding is saved ... the celebration is back on ... the bar is open ... as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever ...

- now, today, here in Matthew 4, what do we see at the start of Jesus' ministry?
 - we see the re-dawning dawning of the kingdom of God
 - and we see the beginning of the end of Satan and his kingdom

- so, why did Jesus come?
 - he came to clean up the mess so that the way things once were in the beginning, before sin entered the world, might be brought back again ... he will open again the way to paradise
 - the tree of life will be back, yielding fruit in every season
 - that blessed reality will come to pass in that future time

- and now, today?
 - is today still a hopeless mess, or is there light and life and hope?
 - if today is still a hopeless mess, then that "glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now ..." makes no sense at all

- what is characteristic of the "now"? ... what can we learn from Matthew 4?
 - we struggle against the devil, the world and our flesh
 - we are engaged in spiritual warfare
 - we face persecution and suffering not only at the hands of other people, but from the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places
 - Ephesians 6:12, "*For we do not wrestle against flesh and*

*blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities,
against the cosmic powers over this present darkness,
against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly
places”*

- so, why did the angels sing, “Glory to God in the highest” when Jesus was born and not save it for Easter when he rose from the dead?
 - or for the last day when the last enemy is finally destroyed?
- and why, with so many hurting and suffering people all around him all the time ... lepers, demon possessed, crippled, lame, blind, deaf ... did Jesus in John 2 choose to turn water into wine for his first miracle?
- and why in Matthew 9:14-15 did the disciples of John the Baptist come to Jesus, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.”
- and why, when they were in prison in Philippi, did Paul and Silas decide to sing hymns
 - and for that matter, why does Paul call us to “Rejoice in the Lord always?”
 - is he deranged?
 - he himself was in prison when he wrote those words
- during this season of Lent we put aside the singing of Alleluia for a time, so we can focus on our sinful condition, come to repentance and be brought near again to God
 - we put aside our alleluias just for a time ... knowing that we will rejoice once again and sing alleluia once again

- that's why this season is not a sad countdown to Good Friday,
but a blessed countdown to the resurrection
- as it was in the beginning, will one day be again, and in the meantime
we are not left powerless, or hopeless
- we are not left subject to wiles and whims and powers of the
Devil

- here's what we need to see today
 - Jesus defeated the devil on that first encounter
 - he won the battle ... and take note of what he used

 - when he set aside his glory he also set aside his divine power
 - when he took on our human nature, he emptied himself and took
on the form of a servant
 - he took on an existence of dependence, relying on the Word
and promises of his heavenly Father
 - what did he use?
 - what was his source of power and comfort and strength?
- he did not defeat the devil by summoning power from his divine
nature
 - he did it with the power that resides in the Word of God
- that's important
 - the Word of God has power
 - when you start to think that you have no power and no
strength and no ability to withstand the devil's
temptations, you are only half right
 - you do not have the power within you
 - you do have the power beside you
 - you hold the power in your hands and on
your lips and in your heart

- for Jesus, there will be more battles after this one
 - the devil left him, but just until an opportune time
 - if you are the Son of God, come down from the cross
and we will believe in you ...
 - if you are the Son of God, save yourself and us ...

- the fight would go on, all the way to the climax of Calvary
 - but Jesus would win that battle too, and he would defeat
even death

- here's what that means ... it is not only a victory for the future
 - it is also a victory for today
 - 1 Corinthians 15:54-58

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

- then Paul says, *"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain"*
- the certain reality of the future kingdom in eternity, fuels our present confidence and the peace we have in our hearts today
- here at the beginning of the battle, we get a foretaste of the end of the battle and the final victory over the devil and temptation
 - so that now, here even in the midst of the battle, we know who
will win ... we know who did win

-and we know we will win ...

*Though hordes of devils fill the land
 All threatening to devour us
 We tremble not, unmoved we stand
 They cannot overpower us
 Let this world's tyrant rage
 In battle we'll engage.
 His might is doomed to fail;
 God's judgment must prevail!
 One little word subdues him.*

-what else can we learn today?

-we know that by ourselves we can never win the battle with the devil

-we know that Jesus did not come simply to show us an example of a holy life so that we could be saved by being like him

-in fact, if you watch and study how Jesus always did everything perfectly, how he never thought of himself first, how he loved his enemies and helped everyone who came to him ... it would only lead you to despair over your own sin and your own weakness

-Jesus as your example to follow is only a help after he has rescued you, defeated the devil and set you free from the fear of death

-your first need is Jesus as your Saviour, fighting your battle for you

-your second need Jesus as your substitute, covering you when you fail, and when the temptations are too much for you

-thanks be to God ... he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ