

**3/1/2009**

Mark 1:9-15

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert,

13 and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.

**15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"**

INTRO - One of my favorite new baseball players is a man named Josh Hamilton. He's really not new. He is 27 and was the first pick in the draft in 1999. But, from 2002 to 2005 he was a cocaine and drug addict. The stories he tells of what he did to his body, how he would wake up in flop houses, how he just wanted to be dead can bring one to tears. But in the Fall of 2005 he came clean. He says he would go through periods of up to 6 months where he didn't even pick up a bat. Last year he led the American League with 130 runs batted in, he hit .304, and hit 32 home runs. He was the star of the Home Run hitting contest in Yankee stadium.

For a man like Josh to play baseball like he does he has to turn from his addiction, but he has to do more. He has to believe he can play again, and work at his skills. Obviously it worked. You might say that Josh's life is one of constant turning from his past, or repenting and trusting in the future, or believing. But, it is obviously not easy.

I. When Jesus began His ministry he had a simple message, the message in Today's Gospel lesson. **Repent and believe the good news!**

A. In some ways this is the message of Lent.

1. We are called to repent, to put our sins behind us and turn to God.

A. This may sound simple, but it is not.

B. Sometimes we enjoy and desire what is sinful.

C. Sometimes what is sinful seems to chase us.

D. Turning from our sin is a constant struggle.

2. But believing may be just as difficult.

A. If I know my rebelliousness, my sinfulness, the dark places in my life, and if I am honest, I can and often will feel worthless.

B. Jesus calls us to believe the good news. To believe that God loves us and sent Him. To believe that He took our sins on Himself. To believe that Jesus paid for my sins and overcame them

C. Such belief will show in a life of thankfulness and obedience, but, it can be harder to believe that God loves me, even harder than admitting and turning from my sin.

3. But that is the call of Lent, and in reality, that is the call of the Christian life.

**Repent and believe the good news!"**

B. Our lesson for today also tells of one of Jesus's struggles.

1. Jesus spent 40 days being tempted in body, mind, and Spirit by the Devil.

2. Mark also tells us about Jesus temptation what no other Gospel tells us; Jesus was in danger, with the wild animals.

3. But in the midst of this temptation and danger, Jesus kept believing what He was told at His baptism, that He was loved by the Father, that He was God's only beloved Son.

4. Jesus resisted temptation and then continued with His work of calling others to the struggle to **Repent and believe the good news!"** Even though such repenting and believing is a constant struggle.

II. Let me read you about what Josh Hamilton says of his lowest point in his life. *"At my lowest point, . . . when I was wasting away to skin and bones and listening to nobody, [my wife] told me I'd be back playing baseball someday. She had no reason to*

*believe in me. During that time, I did nothing to build my body and everything to destroy it. I'd go five or six months without picking up a ball or swinging a bat. By then, I'd been in rehab five or six times -- on my way to eight -- and failed to get clean. I was a bad husband and a bad father, and I had no relationship with God. Baseball wasn't even on my mind. And still Katie told me, "You're going to be back playing baseball, because there's a bigger plan for you." I couldn't even look her in the eye. I said something like, "Yeah, yeah, quit talking to me."*

So many failures made it difficult for Josh to try and risk failing again, and made it difficult to believe he could ever make it again in baseball. But struggling, and with God's help He did it.

- A. When we seek to live a loving life, but have so often hurt someone else, we don't want to try and hurt them again.
  - 1. When we fail in our struggle with sin, we often just want to give up.
  - 2. We're not sure we can keep trying to turn away from our sin..
  - 3. We're not sure we'll ever live as God calls, so . . . why try?
- B. Please look at the example of Jesus tonight.
  - 1. When he faced the difficulty of temptation He did not stop resisting.
  - 2. When Jesus faced the danger of the animals he kept going.
- C. God's call to us is to keep **repenting and believing**.

III. There is a key in this phrase.

- A. Jesus does not say, "Confess your sins and receive your punishment."
  - 1. Repenting implies turning from sin, TO GOD.
  - 2. To repent and believe means to trust that God loves and forgive us.
- B. Jesus resisted temptation, He died on the cross, He faced difficulty and danger, suffering and death, to win and offer God's love to us.
  - 1. Jesus offers God's love today as through faith he forgives us.
  - 2. Jesus offers God's love and forgiveness today in the Lord's supper.
- C. When we struggle to repent and believe, it is the forgiveness of Jesus that gives us the power to admit our failure, to believe God's love, and to keep struggling to repent and believe.

CONCLUSION - Josh tells the story of one day after a game in his first full season in the major leagues with the Cincinnati Reds, in 2007.

*But there is one story that sticks with me, so much so that I think of it every day. I was driving out of the players' parking lot at Great American Ball Park after a game in May, with Katie and our two girls. There's always a group of fans standing at the curb, hoping to get autographs, and I stop to sign as many as I can. And on this particular night, a little boy of about 9 or 10, wearing a Reds cap, handed me a pen and something to sign. Nothing unusual there, but as I was writing the boy said, "Josh, you're my savior." This stopped me. I looked at him and said, "Well, thank you. Do you know who my savior is?" He thought for a minute. I could see the gears turning. Finally, he smiled and blurted out, "Jesus Christ." He said it like he'd just come up with the answer to a test. "That's exactly right," I said. [Josh says] You see, I may not know how I got here from there, but every day I get a better understanding of why.*

For Josh Hamilton, the power to continue turning from his addiction, and using

his talent was the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. For you and me, the strength to keep “**Repenting and believing,**” is the love and forgiveness God has already won for us in Jesus Christ. Amen.