

**Lent 1, 2016**  
**Not So Good, But Righteous Anyway**  
St. Andrew's Church - Jacksonville, OR  
Matthew 4:-11  
By Rev. Mr. William Baker

*"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."*

And tempted he was. Tempted to turn stones into bread to satisfy his hunger, tempted to test the power of the Angels who were there to provide for His every need, tempted with the promise of power to rule over all nations. But Jesus would have none of it...Jesus could see Satan for who he was and his relationship with the Father was too strong to be influenced by evil bribery. Praise be to God that in the flesh of Jesus, God was willing to do for us what would have been an impossible task for mankind.

In Genesis chapter 6 we are enlightened to this very fact; *"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart were evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth...But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord."* Noah found grace...when we read the accounts of Noah's life we see a man with all the fortitude and integrity to carry out the tasks the Lord puts before him. And he does so in spite of the ridicule of those around him. Noah's influence barely spreads beyond his immediate family, but...it's enough for the Lord to do His miraculous work.

In Exodus chapter 3 another man is revealed to us baring all the qualities of a champion of God. We see Moses taking off his shoes to stand on Holy Ground and bare witness of God Almighty in a burning bush...and God speaks to Moses. God will do some of His most miraculous work through this man of faith and the world will be forever changed.

And then we find in 1 Samuel chapter 13, after the poor and inadequate reign of King Saul, that the Lord has chosen David as a man after His own heart, to be the next king. David would lead a nation under the banner of the One and Only God, David would lead armies in the name of the Almighty and David would become an ancestor of Jesus himself!

What great men of God! When we look at these lives this way it makes us wonder how we stack up in our own lives for Christ. We may not be called to greatness as these men were, but what are we doing with what we have been given? When did you last read your bible at length to glean the Word of God? When was the last time you meditated on how you are living your life as a child of God? Do you think God is happy with your choices? Is the Lord the center of your life on a daily basis or only set aside for Sunday's? Chances are we are all failing miserably if we look close enough.

So, is any one really good? Jesus says "no". Mark chapter 10 records a man who comes running to Jesus and calls Him 'good master.' And Jesus's response is a telling response that put's everything in the right perspective; *"Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God."* How true! Why would we ever think that any fallen man could be considered good even if he were called a 'man after God's own heart'?

Noah, a giant of a man, ends up lying naked in a drunken stupor after a night of excess. And Moses, who walked on Holy Ground, does not speak to the rock as God instructed at Meribah, but in anger smites the rock not once but twice. And David, poor David...a man after God's own heart, seduced by 'power', commits adultery and murder. No...there are none that are good, not one, except God.

So, when we look at these great men of God and see the depravity of mankind, when we look at our own lives so full of inequities...how do we resolve our bad behaviors; how do we reconcile our relationship to God the Father?...we take an example from the Pharisees...and we do the opposite. In Matthew chapter 23 Jesus blasts the Scribes and Pharisees; *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess."* (Matthew 23:25) Outward appearances may fool your neighbors your coworkers, your friends and even your family, but God is not tricked by our outward deeds. Good deeds meant for recognition serve

only vainglory. Jesus continues; *Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.* (vs. 26) Jesus is telling us that if we get it right... 'within', it will be reflected in our outward appearance. Only a vessel clean from the inside can be a beacon able to light the way for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We may not be good...but through Christ we can be righteous! Through Christ we can be clean vessels who live by faith in the righteousness of God.

We are in the season of Lent and this is where it all starts for fallen mankind. We come to the Lord Jesus Christ exhorted to mourn...and we listen to David...a man of sin yes, and a man loved by our Father in Heaven. David wrote one of the most beautiful Psalms in all of scripture. If you have no other Lenten practice, please read Psalm 51. And I would challenge you to do this every day through Lent. It begins in complete resignation, face down on the ground; *"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me."* (Psalm 51:1-3)

As good as we are, Lent reminds us how far we have fallen. Noah, Moses and David were all great men of God...and all had major faults. But that is not why God chose them! God chose them because He knew, that even through their transgressions, they would always repent, they would always turn back to Him. Their desire was for their Father in Heaven despite their weaknesses and inability to avoid sinful lives.

This Lent be true to yourselves and to God...let the truth be known...we are sinners in need of mercy and grace. We may not be 'good' but, through the redemptive power of Christ's sacrifice for us we are found righteous in the hands of a fierce God who loves us very much. This Lent be true to yourself and lay it all at the Table. Commit yourself upon the fires of the altar of God and let your iniquities be destroyed. Do not desire pity or make a show of your sacrifice, but find joy in these infirmities, knowing that God's refining fire is purifying your souls unto everlasting life.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.