

## **Barre Congregational Church**

February 18, 2024: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **First Sunday of Lent**~

***“Forty Days and Forty Nights.”***

Our services can be found on our website at [www.barrechurch.com](http://www.barrechurch.com) and Facebook page.

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### **Scripture Reading: Mark 1:9-15**

#### **I. Introduction:**

Sometimes, we are influenced or driven by many factors in our lives to do what we need or desire to do. We are driven by the need to accomplish, to be successful and to be happy. This is all so important and good. It is good to find the earthly fulfilment of things we enjoy. Then there are moments when we are wandering around, not knowing where to turn for answers, filled with fear, and uncertainties. What an ideal time during this period of Lent to bring all that to Christ, our Lord and Saviour, our Friend, and the Son of God, who Himself was driven by God to fulfill His mission on earth.

#### **II. Forty Days and Forty Nights:**

Forty days and forty nights seem like a long time to be in such dire circumstances like Jesus was when He was driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness, surrounded by wild animals and tempted by Satan after being weak from not eating any food for such a long period of time. He was indeed sent into the wilderness to suffer, which for any human being would be awful to endure. In the Matthew and Luke accounts of the temptation story, we see more detailed descriptions of how Jesus was going through a process of withstanding the offers presented to Him by Satan. Should He submit to him, He would be given food, and He would receive all the kingdoms of the world. What a choice to make and what power and strength He had to withstand those temptations.

This wilderness event is preceded by the baptism event of Jesus, where He was affirmed as the Son of God by Godself, speaking from the heavens. He was then surrounded by the Holy Spirit descending upon Him in the form of a dove. The tearing open of the heavens is a powerful event that speaks to the revelation of God Almighty through the Son of God to the

people of God. Mark Strauss in his commentary on Mark suggests that the Spirit of God was now in charge of Jesus' Messianic mission. He was baptized with water and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit to face the challenges of the forty days and forty nights ahead of Him.

And so, while He was tested on a physical level, He was also engaged in a spiritual struggle with the forces of evil. It was suffering indeed, but with His eyes focused on God through it all. He was filled and accompanied by the Holy Spirit, and He was attended to by the angels of God, protecting Him against the wild animals and the dangers of that environment. He would rely not on earthly food and comforts, but completely on the protection and provision of God. In Luke 4 v 10 and Mathew 4 v 6 the gospel writers refer to Psalm 91, a psalm of comfort and reassurance that God is in control and that God intervenes, and when we acknowledge God as our Refuge, that God will command God's angels to guard us in all ways. God's angels would be with Christ, protect Him and serve Him. He would come out of this experience purified and glorified as the Son of God overcoming the forces of evil. And the purpose of it all was to go into Galilee and preach the word of God and heal the sick and drive out evil spirits. He had everything He needed to be the Messiah and to lead His disciples and to become the Head of the Church then and now.

### **III. Conclusion:**

We too have our forty days and forty nights and sometimes longer, of suffering and temptations and wild animals in the form of all kinds of destructive forces that want to destroy our lives and our communities and our world. During times like these we cry, and we yell, and we look around asking where shall our help come from? And the answer is right here this morning. Our help comes from the Lord who went through it all. The Son of God was never alone but was filled with God's Spirit and surrounded by God's angels. We have this time during Lent to remember that and to keep ourselves from the distractions of the world, searching for God amid our struggles, discovering God, and finding our comfort and answers for our troubles. May God be with all of us during our forty days and forty nights. Amen.