

Daniel Waldschmidt – Mark 1:12-15 – 2/14/2015 – Jesus Loved God Most of All

It's February 14th. Valentine's Day. It's the day when we tell those who are closet to us how much we love them. We pass out Valentine's Day cards. Papa Murhpy's, in a stroke of marketing genius, even has a heart shaped pizza. We have a lot of people that we love, don't we? I love my wife. I love my son Luke. I love my parents. I love my friends. I love my congregation. Today, I want to think about how Jesus loved God most of all.

Jesus loved God the Father most of all. Our gospel lesson today happened right after Jesus baptized. Jesus, still wet from his baptism, goes into the desert for 40 days to be tempted by the devil. For understanding this story it is very helpful to see the life of Jesus as a replay of the story of Israel.

Kids, you know from Christ-light, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt and how did they leave Egypt? They went through the Red Sea? And where were they for the next forty years? Wandering around in the desert.

The Israelites went through the water of the Red Sea and then went out into the wilderness for forty years. Jesus goes through the water of baptism and then goes out into the wilderness for forty days. Jesus is reliving in his own life the story of Israel. Why does he have to relive the story of Israel? What went wrong the first time? Well, what did the Israelites do when they were in the desert? They complained. God gave them manna to eat every day. And they got tired of the manna. And so instead of loving God and thanking him for the manna, they complained against him. And so Jesus replays the story and this time gets it right. He goes out into the desert for 40 days. The Israelites at least got manna. Jesus didn't get anything to eat, and he didn't complain, not once. Jesus loved God most of all.

Do you ever get in a heated conversation with someone and you say something you shouldn't and you think to yourself, "I wish I could rewind and do that again." But the problem is we can't rewind and do it again. But the good news is that when Jesus went out into the desert he wasn't just reliving the story of Israel, he was reliving the story of you. When you read the story of Jesus in the desert, think to yourself, "This is Jesus reliving my life and this time getting it right." The times when I've complained about my food, he is doing it and this time not complaining. He relived life for me and didn't sin once. Jesus' life is a do-over of my sinful life and now God lets the do-over count for me!

It's interesting that Mark adds the detail: "He was with the wild animals." The temptation of Jesus is recorded three times: Matthew, Mark and Luke. Mark is the only one that includes this detail: He was with the wild animals. We can't be sure why Mark includes this detail because he doesn't elaborate upon it. But can you think of anyone else who was with the animals when Satan came and tempted them? Adam and Eve. They were in the garden of Eden, Adam had just named all the animals, and Satan came and tempted them and they rebelled against God. Here Jesus replays Adam and Eve's story. He was with the wild animals and Satan came and tempted him and he didn't give into temptation. I'm sure you can think of many times when you have given into temptation. But Jesus did not give in to temptation, and God lets the do-over count for you. And when the devil comes to you and reminds you of the times he has one and persuaded you to fall into temptation, you can say, "Yeah, devil, you're right, you defeated me, but you didn't defeat Jesus, and God lets Jesus' perfect obedience count for me."

Jesus not only resisted temptation, but he loved God most of all. One time someone asked Jesus, "What's the greatest commandment?" And Jesus said, "The greatest commandment is 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' This is the greatest commandment." This really should destroy any thought we have that we do a pretty good job of keeping God's commandments. We don't even keep the first one. We love our careers more than God. We love our children more than God. We often think of God as an add on to our life and God says no I deserve to be your whole life. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength. If we lived a thousand lifetimes, if we got a thousand do-overs, we would never be able to love God with all our heart and soul and strength and mind.

But Jesus loved God most of all, and his obedience of that greatest commandment counts for us. Mark doesn't tell us what the specific temptations were, but we know what they were from Matthew and Luke. And with all three temptations the devil tried to sever the connection of love between Jesus and God. The first temptation was to turn stones into bread and if Jesus would have turned the stones into bread he would have been saying to God, "You're not going to provide for me, I'll have to provide for myself, I'll have to go off on my own and turn these stones into bread." But Jesus loved God enough to say, "No, God is the one who has led me out here. He will provide for me when he sees fit. I'm not going to break off on my own and sever the connection of love between me and my Father." The second temptation was to jump off a high building because after all the Bible says, "God is going to send his angels to protect you." But Jesus loved God enough to trust him without first testing him to see if his promises were really true. In the last temptation the devil said, "Bow down and worship me and I will give you all the treasure and all the kingdoms of the world." But worshiping the Father was Jesus' treasure. He loved the Father so much more than anything in this world. Nothing was going to sever the connection of love between Jesus and the Father. And as our lesson in Romans 8 says, Nothing is going to sever the connection between Jesus and you. When Jesus went to the cross it showed his unbreakable love for the Father and it also showed his unbreakable love for you.

So on this Valentine's Day as we think about love, think about how much Jesus loved the Father, and how much he loved you. The greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind. Jesus did that perfectly and his perfect obedience counts for you before God. The second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. And of course Jesus did that perfectly too. He loved you so much that he gave up himself on the cross for you. So today think about Jesus' great love for the Father and his great love for you. Amen.