

*9In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." 12And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.*

*14Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."*

I can still hear my grandfather Schlessman saying it: "I was never sick a day in my life."

For eighty years it was true. Other people took days off, other people got the flu, other people were weak, but not John Schlessman. Until one day he was sick and he never got well again. For eight years he was sick and weak and just like other people. And then he died.

It was in those years of sickness that I remember him saying it. Most every time I went to visit him he said it: "I was never sick a day in my life." But what he spoke as a boast years earlier was now spoken in dismay. He could not believe it was happening to him. He did not know how to face it. Through the years other people had been learning how to cope with sickness, my grandfather never did. All through those years of sickness he felt betrayed by life, betrayed by God.

I can't tell you how many times I have heard those who lived through the depression say, "I fear for this younger generation if hard times ever come again. They aren't prepared for it. They have always had it easy."

If you never get in water over your head, you may never learn to swim.

In our gospel today Jesus starts in Galilee, ends up in Galilee. Same place – but was he the same?

Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased." And immediately the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him.

Jesus is not in charge here. The Spirit enters him, the Father speaks to him, the Spirit drives him into the wilderness, angels minister to him. Was he changed? Did the word from heaven plant faith in him? Was that faith tested out there in the wilderness? Strengthened, tempered as steel is tempered?

I don't know. I only know that when he returned to Galilee he began to proclaim the good news of God, saying, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news."

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says of Jesus, "Though he was a Son he learned obedience through what he suffered and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

He learned obedience through what he suffered.

Learned.

Jesus was not a finished product when he came down to the Jordan – at least not as Mark tells us of him. What happened in his baptism was not for the crowds, but was witnessed by him, spoken to him. "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased."

Unlike some of the other gospel writers Mark does not tell us what happened out there in the wilderness. For Jesus' being tempted was not in order to teach us something, but was to prepare him. He learned obedience through what he suffered.

Sometimes to the young it appears that life is mostly a matter of talent. You've either got it or you don't. They see a Manny Ramirez hitting the ball out of the park and think of how lucky he is – never being aware of the hours he spends each day working to become better.

Or they see the class valedictorian getting top grades on test after test, thinking she is smart, but never taking into account the hard work of studying and disciplining herself.

Or they see a man drive by in an expensive car, thinking how easy his life must be, never taking into account the long hours, the late hours, the risks, the concentration, the dedication that have brought him success.

Jesus was tested. Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered.

Not even for Jesus was faith simply a matter of thought. He learned obedience in suffering, in living.

It is easy to say, "I trust in God." But it is hard to do.

It was easy for my grandfather to be well, all those years. But he simply wasn't ready for sickness when it came.

When Jesus came out of that wilderness he came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news."

Repent, turn to a new way of thinking and acting. Live your life trusting in God, loving as God loves, risking your comfort and ease and security in letting the Spirit of God take you where God wants you to be.

I think of what it is like to go down the hallway at Good Samaritan Nursing Home or Avon Oaks Nursing Home. As soon as I start down the hall there are people who want some of me. A greeting, a minute of listening, ten minutes of listening, help in escaping from this place, everyone I encounter is looking for something. It is overwhelming. And so I am tempted to go down that hall with my arms wrapped around myself.

What you encounter every place that you go in your life is not different from that. In your homes, in your places of work, at the school, at the church, everyone wants something from you, especially those who have the least to offer you in return. Will you give yourself? What will happen then?

Trusting in God is not something that happens in thinking but rather in living. Those with the deepest faith are those who have been most tested and who have experienced God's hands holding them, carrying them, lifting them up. Jesus went out into the wilderness to learn faith. He wants you to follow through those places that make you afraid – he throws you into waters that are over your head.

Jesus gave himself and the crowds grew. Soon they were crushing in upon him. Whatever Jesus gave they wanted more.

Yet Jesus received what he needed every step of the way, until finally in death he was awakened by the Father's voice, lifted by the Father's hand.

He has promised it will be the same with you.