

What happens when you play a country song in reverse? You get your house back, your wife back, your dog back, and your truck back.

I think that joke resonates with us as we can relate to a bad news world of tragedy striking suddenly. Who of us has not lost a loved one? Who of us has not lost a pet? Who of us has not faced disappointment and unmet expectations? Who of us has not lost prized possessions whether it be a truck or our favorite toy?

As we approach our Gospel reading for the first Sunday in Lent, we need to read this in conjunction with the first chapters of Genesis as we hear the story of creation and Adam and Eve. We read in Genesis 3: “...**therefore the LORD God [cast] him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.**” As devastating as all the various tragedies in our lives may be, this is the tragedy of tragedies. To have lived in paradise and then to be tossed out! We can only imagine how majestic the Garden of Eden must have been, but for Adam and Eve to have tasted yet been tossed out!

Jesus steps onto the scene and we learn that **JESUS REVERSES THE CURSE OF ADAM**. Just like playing a country song backwards, Jesus undoes all the horrible things that our sins and Adam’s have caused. Jesus restores creation.

First, we learn **I. The Holy Spirit casts Jesus into the wilderness**. For starters, we recap the baptism of Jesus which we just read last month on the Sunday of the Baptism of our Lord. “**And when [Jesus] came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”**” What a glorious thing! What an amazing miracle, mission accomplished, cue credits, right?

Not exactly. Jesus’ baptism is the moment at which God hits reverse on the tape deck, and evil starts coming undone. It is this point at which God’s work of restoring creation begins, and it starts in a way you wouldn’t expect.

We all have to love the evangelist Mark for how unusual he is. “**The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.**” It’s not that the Holy Spirit just drove Him out, He cast Him out. He threw Him out. If the Baptism of our Lord is the finale of the first act, then the temptation of Jesus is the shepherd’s hook coming in and yanking Jesus violently off stage.

In fact, it’s the same word used to describe Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. “**therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.**” Because of Adam’s failure, he was cast out of paradise and had to try to make something out of nothing working the ground in the wilderness.

The Spirit casts Jesus into the wilderness, and the wilderness no longer becomes desolate. The place that is the place of the devil and wild animals becomes tame because of Jesus' ministry and service.

This fits into the bigger picture of why Jesus came in the first place. He left the perfection of heaven to become man. When we confess in the creed that He was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man, this was not entirely dissimilar to what we read in the Gospel lesson today. The Holy Spirit drove Him into this world to face our sins, our tragedies, and our sorrows.

Which brings us to our second point, II. Jesus overcomes temptation when Adam couldn't. Remember, Jesus reverses the curse. The events in our Gospel text today are in reverse order from our account from Genesis. The Holy Spirit tosses Jesus into the wilderness, **“And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.”**

Jesus was tossed into the wilderness to be tempted. Adam was tossed out of paradise because he was tempted and failed. When you play country music backwards you get your house back, your wife back, your dog back, and your truck back. When you play the fall of mankind backwards, it looks like Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. When you play the fall of mankind backwards, you get your life back, you get your loved ones back, and you get God's holiness back.

Mark in his typical brevity does not give us the three temptations of Jesus like we read in Matthew or Luke. He just tells us that Jesus was in the wilderness being tempted by Satan. For Mark, the point is not the specific temptations Jesus faced, but that Jesus faced Satan throughout those forty days, and came back unscathed.

He faced temptation for you, and He overcame temptation for you. When you and I so easily give in to Satan's temptation and the deceitfulness of sin, Jesus held fast. He didn't give an inch because He knew what was at stake. His perfection is counted to us when we fail, and as Jesus reverses the curse through this victory, He works to reverse the curse in our lives as He forgives each and every one of our sins.

Of course, this isn't a fair comparison. We are born with original sin which means we have the weight of Adam's sin around our necks. We are born with a propensity to sin, and even from birth we are born corrupted by this inherited sin.

On the other hand, Adam and Eve did not have original sin. There was no weight on the scale, so to speak, against them. Nonetheless, they sinned when they ate of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and they had no original sin or corruption. They failed and because of them, creation has fallen apart. Because of them we live in a world where you lose your house, your wife leaves, your dog dies, and your truck is totaled.

That's why we rejoice at Jesus' overcoming of temptation. Those sins are forgiven, and the curse is reversed because He resisted Satan. He resisted Satan even to the point of death as Satan drove Jesus to the cross, and sent evil men to crucify and kill Jesus upon a tree. Little did Satan know that that was all part of the plan, part of the plan to reverse the curse that Satan caused by tempting Adam and Eve to eat from that first tree.

Finally, III. Jesus reverses the curse of creation. At the end of Jesus' temptation we read, "**And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.**" Again, another unique Markan detail, and we wonder what Mark was thinking. However, I think it has something to do with what immediately preceded the fall into sin.

"Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name." Adam named all the animals. He didn't need to worry about the lions eating him or the elephants trampling him.

Isaiah prophesies, "**The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain," says the LORD.**" Isaiah pictures a world where there will be no more violence, no more death, and even wild animals won't be so wild. It's not entirely different than it was in the Garden of Eden.

And it's not so different than what it will be like when Jesus comes again to create a new heaven and a new earth. "**Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."**" The Messianic Kingdom that started with Jesus' baptism, temptation, and earthly ministry, death, and resurrection will be completed as Jesus comes again, but that reversal starts even from the beginning as Jesus overcomes Satan in the desert.

Even better than a country song in reverse, Jesus' overcoming of temptation marks the playing of the fall of mankind in reverse. What does that look like? Dostoyevsky paints us a picture in the Brothers Karamazov, writes, "I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage, ... that in the world's finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, of all the blood they've shed; that it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened with men." This is what we look forward to as we pray, and we pray, Amen, come Lord Jesus!