

Baptism of Jesus
Mark 1:4 – 11
Rev. Susan Pickering

Message

What a whirlwind weekend and I hope that you are all traveling gently as we find ourselves in this short sharp lockdown, and my prayer is that it is indeed short.

This week I am focussing on the Mark reading, which was available on the website and our Youtube Channel, so let's jump in.

Today is known as the Baptism of Jesus and we journey into the season of Epiphany, the appearance of God. Mark is the shortest Gospel, written in first century Palestine and understood to be the earliest gospel.¹ Originally written in Greek, the text contains some latin and semitic arrangements this suggesting Greek may not have been the authors first language.² The Gospel of Mark is said to be a 'narrative for and about the common people, and further suggested to 'be a story by, about and for those committed to God's work of justice, compassion and liberation in the world.'³ As the text unfolds it reveals the realities of the world in 1st century Roman Palestine, realities of poverty, disease, hopelessness and disenfranchisement that impacted on the majority of people living in that time.

Our reading today is part of the prologue of Mark. The chapter commences with; 'The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.'⁴ The Greek that's translated as good news is εναγγελιον (enagellion) the same greek word that's translated and used interchangeably with the word Gospel. We're given no hint as to who's speaking these words, yet it's clear that it's someone invested in this story.⁵ Verse 2 suggests that it's as spoken by Isaiah, yet it's a combination of Malachi⁶ and Isaiah,⁷ verse 3 are the words that are placed into the mouth of John the baptist in Matthew⁸ and Luke.⁹

Verse 4 is the beginning of our reading today and starts with the entrance of John the Baptist. We're told that John proclaimed 'a baptism of repentance for the

¹ Finger in Preaching the Word on sojo.net

² Myers

³ Myers

⁴ NRSV Mark 1:1

⁵ Juel

⁶ Mark 1:2b (Malachi 3:1)

⁷ Mark 1:3 (Isaiah 40:3)

⁸ Matthew 3:3b

⁹ Luke 3:4b

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forgiveness of sins'¹⁰ and that; 'people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem'¹¹ were participating. We're then alerted to the somewhat strange attire and diet of John, Ok, once more we need to remember that the 1st century people had first century scriptures and promises in their memories. John's strange clothes would've evoked among images among the people of Elijah.¹² As for the diet, well it was understood that prophets didn't eat meat or drink wine, and that Locusts were a substitute for meat, personally I'd stick with lentils, but there you have it and honey water a substitute for wine.¹³ So strange he may be, but what is being revealed is that he was prophet, although it's suggested he was a popular prophet not an official one.¹⁴ John was a man of both political and religious importance and according to Josephus, and was more well known than Jesus.¹⁵ John goes on to proclaim the one coming who is more powerful, who's sandals he's not worthy to untie, he baptises with water the more powerful one will baptise with the Holy Spirit.¹⁶

Enter Jesus, who came from Nazareth of Galilee, as a quick note here, Nazareth was an unremarkable village, not recorded in any ancient source,¹⁷ as for Galilee, it was understood to be a notorious region,¹⁸ and for the record probably around 100 miles away.¹⁹

Anyhoo, he came and was baptised, just like that, no discussion and there is absolutely no indication that John even recognises him,²⁰ unlike Matthew who adds a little conversation that suggests John knew exactly who Jesus was and it's like "really, I need to be baptised by you!" Then it's at the moment of Jesus coming up out of the water he sees the heavens torn apart, the Spirit descending like a dove and the voice declaring, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'²¹

¹⁰ Mark 4

¹¹ Mark 5

¹² 2 Kings 1:8

¹³ Guelich

¹⁴ Borg

¹⁵ Juel

¹⁶ Mark 1: 7-8

¹⁷ Myers

¹⁸ Price in Preaching the Word on sojo.net

¹⁹ Borg

²⁰ Matthew 3:13

²¹ Mark 1:11b

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Mark includes no birth narrative, we encounter Jesus for the first time as an adult, yet in the opening verse Jesus is identified as Χριστος, (Kriston) Christ a term of great significance, the Hebrew equivalent is Messiah. The fact that Jesus participates in a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins, leaves many people scrambling to protect the sinless character of Jesus, fearing that John will be seen as superior to Jesus.²² Why do we work so hard at trying to defend and save Jesus? We're pretty stuffed if that's what we have to do. Jesus participated, he made no attempt at exerting his superiority, he participated fully in baptism affirming the existence of those around him as his own,²³ he identified deeply and in solidarity with humanity.

The vision and voice, are presented in Mark as a private experience, there is no mention of anyone else witnessing. The heavens are torn apart, there's a sense of permanency, the barrier between heaven and earth is removed, there's a meeting of the God sphere in the human sphere. Then the Spirit, she descends like a dove, yes she, the Spirit and her verbs are feminine in Hebrew, neuter in Greek, it was centuries later that the masculine was introduced.²⁴ She possessed him, filled him, with the power to confront the powers and principalities of the world.²⁵ Then the voice comes, in Judaism voice was "the daughter of a sound" it's evocative and provocative, this is no ordinary sound.²⁶ What awaits this newly baptised Human One is temptation in the wilderness, an account we enter into at the beginning of Lent.

We hear about the baptism of Jesus every year around this time, and at this point here in Brisbane as we find ourselves a short sharp lockdown reflecting on our baptism may seem like a pointless exercise. I guess I am hoping that at this time as we once again watch church from home is that you to hold on to the hope and maybe spend some time reflecting on baptism.

You see baptism, with water comes the promise of new life and new community, the Spirit, as she descended upon each of us, possess us and compels us to communicate the good news in word and action. It all may seem a bit pie in the sky at the minute, this Pandemic has brought chaos into the world, many to their knees, yet we must hold on to the hope of newness.

As the body of Christ we are not called to simply continue the message of Jesus but to continue the work, which is difficult in lock down, or is it, because part of the

²² Crossan

²³ Cone

²⁴ Gafney in Preaching the Word on sojo.net

²⁵ Boyce

²⁶ Borg

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work is to make real the love of God, to make sure that we never forget the heavens were torn apart and to ensure that no repair attempts are made with make shift barriers in the form of gender, colour, sexuality, ability, judgement of any form.

We are possessed by the same Spirit, she is the still small voice that we are to listen for, she is the one who will empower us to be the presence of Jesus in the here and now, to stand against anything that harms, to stand against hate with love and at times like this love is so important, there are so many that have been denied love, there will be so many over this weekend that are denied contact with others. Let us do the work of Jesus at this time, with simple acts, pick up the phone, send an email, let us be love in action.

Prayer By Ian Withnall

Lord God, we gather before you in prayer, celebrating your presence in our lives and in our world.

The old year has ended and a new one lies before us. Normally, a new year is full of promise, hope and potential with so much to look forward to – weddings or anniversaries, the birth of children and grandchildren, and the company of good friends. However, this year, these are overshadowed by uncertainty as COVID still rages across the world, and even here, where we have fared much better, we know that as we experience lockdown this weekend, our plans can be affected at short notice. We thank you for our community leaders and those in government, who are working tirelessly to make the difficult decisions on our behalf. We pray for those in quarantine, and those who provide services for them, that you will protect them from infection.

Lord God, we bring before you in our prayers all of those who are fearful of what the year will bring because of anxiety and ill-health. We think of all who have family difficulties and are concerned as to how to solve them, and all who are fearful for their jobs who are suffering loss of livelihood due to shut-downs, quarantines, closed borders, and other restrictions. We think of those who struggle with an addiction to alcohol or other drugs, for all victims of domestic violence, all who are homeless and those who mourn the loss of loved ones.

With so much emphasis on the pandemic in the media, it is easy to forget that conflicts continue in many parts of the world and that famine, drought and other natural disasters continue to impact on people. We remember that you too had to flee with your mother and father to Egypt to escape violence by a tyrannical ruler, we hold before you all in our world today who have been forced to flee to foreign lands, and those who live in refugee camps or are held in detention.

We pray that your grace and your wisdom will be with the world's leaders and decision makers so that mistrust and bitterness between nations might be replaced

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by peace and concord. We especially remember the people of the United States at this time of transition and turmoil, and that the coming year and new administration will bring some healing to that divided nation.

As we move into our wet season, we pray for those in our State who are already experiencing flooding. We know that the rain comes as a blessing, particularly for farmers and graziers and in filling our reservoirs, but we pray for those whose properties are inundated or lives that are threatened. We pray that people will be kept safe; that property damage be minimal. Give strength to our emergency services and SES volunteers.

We pray for St Andrews congregation and for our minister Susan, the elders and for all individuals who work together to lead us in worship and ensure the smooth running of the church, particularly in these difficult times.

In our daily lives, help us to have the faith to trust in you, the wisdom to do the right thing, and to be guided by you constantly, and that your Spirit will encourage all people to live in love and peace.

All this we ask and pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Words of Mission & Blessing

Stay Safe,
Know that we are united to Jesus in our baptism,
Remember baptism isn't a means to an end, it's a new beginning.
As we move back into our daily lives,
Let us hope that the lock down is short,
Let the life and ministry of Jesus inform all we say and do,
Remember always we are part of the body of Christ.

May the blessing of God, fill our hearts with love.
May the blessing of Christ, fill our spirits with the desire to work for change in the world.
And may the blessing of the Holy Spirit continue to hover over the world she birthed, touching the lives of the whole of humanity filling us with hope of new beginnings.

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Sources

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