

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, November 28, 2021

Mark 1:1-11

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,’”

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

In those days 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.”

as our little ones had to worship and wonder we give thanks for the gift of family i gotta tell you this being the first time that the kids have been up front since i've been here um that's a joy that is a real joy to get to experience so we're grateful for that

we have two scripture lessons this day the first comes from the prophet jeremiah before i read from that text i invite you to join me in a word of prayer let's pray together

gracious and loving spirit fall afresh on us in these moments fall afresh on us and quiet any voice within us but your own that we might hear your word for us this day and that in hearing we might be called to lead lives of response so may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you god our rock and our redeemer amen hear the prophet's words this day

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the days are surely coming says the lord when i will fulfill the promise i made to the house of israel and the house of judah in those days and at that time i will cause a righteous branch to spring up from david he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land in those days judah will be saved and jerusalem will live in safety and this is the name by which it will be called the lord is our righteousness here ends the reading of god's holy word so if you're joining us for the first time in a while or if you've never visited idaho before i want you to know that we're kicking off a new worship series it's going to take us all the way through this season of advent as we prepare for the coming of the christ child but we also prepare for the coming of christ in our lives and in the world the name of this series is do you hear what i hear and so we'll move through each of the different gospels and we'll get a glimpse we'll listen for what it is that that gospel writer is trying to communicate by how they tell the story of the coming of jesus christ how is it that they begin the gospel together you know there's different ways that we can grow in our knowledge of scripture there's different ways that we can teach our children about scripture there are ways that are very specific we can study scripture together we can open to a letter of paul or to a particular passage and commit it to memory or spend time wrestling with all of its implications we can also grow in our knowledge of scripture our biblical literacy by by understanding some general arcs of scripture often when we do studies of scripture we go more specific so i think it might be helpful for us in this season of advent to go with that general arc of a text it should go without saying that the different voices are important for us to listen to diverse voices in our lives they help to shape our understanding of the world our knowledge of ourselves and the world around us the people around us and so what we'll do in advent is we'll listen for those unique voices the gospel of mark begins our time together in that study so i invite you to hear these words from mark the first chapter verses one through eleven

the beginning of the good news of jesus christ the son of god it is written in the prophet isaiah see i am sending my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way the voice of one crying out in the wilderness prepare the way of the lord make his path straight john the baptizer appeared in the wilderness proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and people from the whole judean countryside and all the people of jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the river jordan confessing their sins now john was clothed with camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist and he ate locusts and wild honey he proclaimed the one who was more powerful than i is coming after me i am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong with his sandals i have baptized you with water but he will baptize you with the holy spirit and in those days 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 from heaven said you are my son the beloved with you i am well pleased the grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our lord endures forever amen

so it should go without saying that different perspectives are important but often in scripture we we want to imagine that there is only one way of communicating the gospel but it turns out if we look at the arc of all the gospels we have we have different voices they articulate this good news in a different way and they begin the telling of that story in different ways as well i love hiking i love going out to the american west spent a good amount of time out there and it seems to me

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that there's there's this image in the teton mountains that is helpful for us as we begin our study uh has anybody been to the teton mountain range before hiked it before we got a handful of yeah good stuff um so what's interesting about this range itself is is the way it looks depending on the angle that you come at it from right so if you are to approach the the mountain range from the wyoming side and then you'll see this beautiful series of lakes right there to the east of the range and then the rain just climbs almost from nothing to the sky jagged edges peering into god's creation and so if you only came and hiked at it or came to it from the wyoming side that would be what you imagine the mountain range looks like but if you come at it from the idaho side something very different there's this there's this long build that happens you have to not just go over some water but you spend time gradually climbing to those peaks so if if you were to only come at it from from that side from from the idaho side of the tetons then you would think that perhaps this is uh not as not as majestic maybe maybe it's not as uh a spectacular to look at but it but it has something else of value to it it takes longer to get to the top and the view is extraordinary i was out there a couple years ago and had the opportunity to come out those mountains from from either side and what i saw is that when i'm able to do that when i can look at something from two at least two different perspectives and probably even more and i can grasp i can grasp i'll pause okay i want to pray for whoever those folks are heading to right now you can grasp the gravity of what it is that you are standing upon right in a different way you can appreciate it that's what happens when we read the four different gospel accounts the coming of our savior jesus christ mark it turns out is the earliest of the gospel writers that wasn't thought to be the case for a long time just actually in the last 100 years or a little bit more we figured out that that mark is the earliest of the gospels we figured this out um in from a couple different things but we we figured it out because the way in which he speaks about something that happened around 70 the year 70. there was a great conflict at that time he speaks of that and he speaks to it in a way that one would know that it was written in that time so mark presents the first account he is the first author that says the story of our savior jesus christ needs to be written down somewhere i need to put pen to parchment paper i need to begin to take all these stories that i've heard now some four decades after the crucifixion and resurrection of jesus christ i need to start putting them down on parchment that means that mark has a different view of things than the other gospel writers i want to present a bit of alliteration this morning for you sometimes they seem a little catchy and sometimes they might be helpful for you if you're trying to grow in your knowledge of scripture there are three s's that mark presents for us he presents the significance of simplicity the significance of suffering and the significance of the right starting point simplicity suffering and a starting point marx is the shortest gospel only 16 chapters this will be the shortest of the sermons that i'll give in this season of advent and we'll keep this one simple

often we try to make faith in jesus very very complicated very complex presbyterians are very good at doing that actually we'll commit create committees and subcommittees to do all sorts of different things we will create bureaucracy upon bureaucracy right to make decisions for us if you're not presbyterian you don't get the joke that's okay but we have a way of complicating things for ourselves but mark presents a different way of believing and following in jesus christ it is a distilled way a simplistic straightforward way what you don't hear at the beginning of the gospel of mark is what you do not hear about the story of the birth of jesus christ you do not hear about a manger or stars or angels singing in the sky you don't hear about shepherds you don't

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hear about there not being room at the end you don't hear any of that instead mark starts in a different way the beginning of the good news of jesus christ the son of god and then he jumps straight to the prophetic word he connects jesus to the prophet isaiah actually he connects john the baptist to the prophet isaiah there's going to be one who's going to come and make straight in the desert a way for god to move through the world there will be one crying out in that wilderness prepare the way of the lord and john the baptist does that with camel hair around himself and a leather belt and some wild honey and locust it's the shortest of the gospels is also the most straightforward in its language it's beautiful in its simplicity mark unpacks simply from the very beginning the story that you are about to hear and read it is about the savior of the world the one that has come to save not you and not just me but all people because this one is the son of god there's something beautiful about the simplicity of this gospel and maybe you need to hear that this morning perhaps you enjoy diving deep into the deep theological questions of our day and our time and that's good and beautiful and you have a home here at idlewild if you want to do that but perhaps sometimes for you you need the more simple truths that the one that has brought us here this day is indeed the son of god one that has come to save the entire creation so there's a significance in the simplicity of this gospel there's also significance in the suffering that mark outlines perhaps more so than any of the other gospels jesus foretells in the gospel of mark the necessity of suffering three times he tries to let the disciples know and the people who are listening know what is going to happen to him three times they do not get it that's another theme in the gospel of mark the image of the suffering servant is perhaps more pronounced in this gospel than any other gospel this suffering though is not just to lead to a gory understanding of god or god's creation it is to lead us and to expose a few things is to lead us first

to lead us first to this understanding that this gospel understanding that any suffering is no match for the power of god that god is stronger than any suffering that the world can inflict upon the savior and upon itself jesus is a suffering servant in this gospel so that you might know and that the world might know in our suffering we have companionship in our suffering we have faith in a god who can overcome that with a healing bomb of forgiveness and new life so perhaps this day you came with a heavy heart navigating something that can barely be articulated the gospel of mark would tell you that even in your suffering or perhaps particularly in your suffering jesus meets you there whether that be loneliness or exclusion whether it be pain inflicted by someone really close to you or pain that you have inflicted the gospel of mark tells us that there is the significance in suffering

and that christ can be found there so there's significance in simplicity there's significance and suffering and finally there's significance in how we start our stories what is the starting point we have john the baptist clothed in camel's hair eating honey and wild locusts

he pronounces that there will be one who will come after him that he is not even worthy to to lean down and untie his sandals he says there is one that is coming i baptize you with water there's one that's going to come and baptize you with the holy spirit

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this baptism that you're experiencing here is nothing compared to what is going to happen and then we have this amazing scene jesus goes down into the water and as he comes up the skies break open the skies break open and then something like a dove that would be the spirit of god descends upon him and then we hear a voice that echoes from the heavens you are my son the beloved with you i am well pleased they are significant to the starting point of the gospel of mark because sometimes we imagine that faith has to start from a place of brokenness that first we have to somehow acknowledge the terribleness of the world or of humanity or of creation but that's not how the gospel of mark starts the gospel of mark starts with belovedness the sky opens up the dove comes down and then a voice that says you are my son the beloved with you i am well pleased two stories will keep them quick you might have noticed when i came about nine months ago i started to address you as beloved the question was raised at some point just a few weeks in beloved he doesn't even know us how how can he address us as beloved because christ addresses you as beloved god addresses you as beloved before you can be known even you are given an identity of belovedness just as the son of god christ was as those waters so his waters were broken as his body went down into him and then the skies were torn apart you may have been told that you have another identity in this world that supersedes that identity you were told a lie the truth is that you are first and foremost and forever identified as beloved by god there is no other identity that supersedes that identity none known that the world gives you none that that people at your work or even at home give you you are beloved there is no name that the church can give you or any other institution can give you besides beloved because that is what you are called by god that is the beginning of your story because it is the beginning of the story of our savior the one whom jesus called abba father speaks from heaven you are my son the beloved with you i am well pleased in staff meeting each week we do lectio divina and we we read through the text together we ask for different reflections from our staff members about what this text brings up for them

jenny brooks mentioned one this week she said she remembers this text being preached in the chapel some years ago this text from the beginning of the gospel of mark steve montgomery was preaching there in that chapel instead of giving a normal blessing to end that time he walked down the aisle that day looked at all 30 40 50 people that were in that space and he said you are beloved with you god is well pleased with you god is well pleased with you god as well pleased each person looking them in the eyes over and over with you god is well pleased

it strikes me that the gospel of mark the author of the gospel wants you to know before we get into the rest of this story which is going to be amazing you're going to read about things you you could never imagine being done in the world saved by the power of god but before we get to that you need to have the right posture in your reading you need to have the right posture in your learning you need to have the right posture as we move towards this story that will change the entire world you need to know that your starting point is forever and always beloved in the eyes of god we're going to spend the next few weeks moving through the other gospels go through matthew and luke and john each are going to give you a different perspective on on what it is that these authors want you to hear and see about jesus christ but know this the earliest of the gospels the one written only a few decades after the death and resurrection of jesus christ begins with a word from heaven torn apart and a voice that clearly speaks you are my son you are my

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daughter you are my child you are the beloved and with you i am well pleased so may the
simplicity and the suffering that is overcome by the power of god and this starting point that we
have this day lead us and guide us on this advent journey may it be so this day and every day
amen