



LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Brian Mitchell

January 10, 2021

Holy Water: Jesus' Baptism

Mark 1 :4-11

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Whatever your need is this morning I hope that in the words of scripture found in Mark concerning Jesus' baptism we will find some hope and peace and words to help us move forward.

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It begs the question, why did Jesus need to be baptized? Why does this perfect man, the Son of God need the baptism of repentance that John was preaching? It's a good question and one that John himself asks. In Mark's account, John says he is not fit to untie the thong of His sandals, but in Matthew's account of Jesus baptism we have a little more conversation.

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To fulfill all righteousness. Perhaps Jesus had Isaiah 53: 11 in mind, which says:

**"Out of his anguish he shall see light;
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The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,
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He understood for all to be made righteous he had to align with the people who were being baptized. Certainly, this was Jesus grand entrance onto the scene. It was His announcement of the beginning of His ministry. It was a definitive moment in His life. His baptism establishes His identity and authority. It was also His time of being approved and equipped by God.

But it is his aligning with those who need to be baptized that catches my attention. Jesus' baptism shows that He identified with sinners. His baptism symbolized the sinners' baptism into the righteousness of Christ, dying with Him and rising free from sin and able to walk in the newness of life. His perfect righteousness would fulfill all the requirements of the Law for sinners who could never hope to do so on their own. When Jesus says that it was proper to "fulfill all righteousness" by this He is referring to the righteousness that He provides to all who come to Him to exchange their sin for His righteousness.

There is also incredible humility in the baptism of Jesus. He did not need to do this. But He wants to announce who He is and be aligned with the people.

Then we have this wonderful scene, when Jesus comes out of the water, where the heavens are torn open and the voice of God saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove. It is a wonderful image of the trinity as The Father speaks and The Spirit descends on The Son as a dove.

The verb used for the heavens being torn apart is only used one other time in the Gospel, when the temple curtain is torn in two from top to bottom when Jesus died. It implies a violent invasion of God into a sinful world. The heavens are torn apart not to allow us a vision of God but to allow God's power to become present in Jesus. It is a dramatic picture that Mark paints. It is supposed to grab our attention. This man being baptized is one with God and has the power of God upon Him.

As Jesus aligns himself with those who need repentance, it allows them to also align themselves with Him.

And if those folks find righteousness in His righteousness, is it too much to hear the words of God and

for them to also receive those words.

If we align ourselves with Jesus through baptism, if we find righteousness in His righteousness, is it too much for us to hear the words of God for Jesus and accept them for us.

Now don't get me wrong. When the heavens were torn open, those words spoken were for Jesus as He was baptized. But if we live in that righteousness found in Jesus, we must not be afraid to hear those words for ourselves. It would be good for us all to write that phrase from God on our hearts. Think on those words for you. **You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.**

When you feel less than, when you are not sure you can do this faith, when you are hurt, when you have hurt, when you are overwhelmed, remember your righteousness is found in Jesus and because of that, you are His Beloved Child and with you God is pleased.

You may remember your baptism; you may have made vows yourself as you were baptized. There may have been others who made those vows for you, many of you have made those baptismal vows for others. You have promised as a congregation to raise the children of this church in the faith.

Those promises and vows mean something. It is not just a ritual that we need to go through. It is not a meaningless act to keep family members happy. It is a solemn promise to live a new life in Jesus and with Jesus. It is a solemn vow to raise our children in the faith. Some would claim baptism is required for salvation. I do not see that in scripture, but I do believe it is an act of obedience and it is aligning ourselves with Jesus who knew how important it was for Him to be baptized regardless of His need of repentance.

It is important that we take our baptismal promises and vows seriously and we live that baptismal life.

I was reminded by a friend this week of that baptism scene in *The Godfather*, one of the most powerful scenes in cinematic history, where Michael Corleone is renouncing Satan and all his works while all the heads of the other families are being killed at Michael's command. It is a powerful scene which reminds us that it is too easy to make a mockery of our baptismal vows.

The language about heaven being torn apart is found in Isaiah 64 when the prophet cries out,

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I am sure many of us this week found ourselves wishing God would tear open the heavens and come down so the mountains would quake at His presence.

We have been angry, outraged, embarrassed, defensive, disappointed. We have yelled, we have cried, we may even have tried to hold civil conversations. We have certainly been active on social media. We have felt helpless, motivated to bring change, we have wondered what comes next for our great country. Many have stopped to pray, to listen, to bring comfort.

We have LPC members on both sides of the political divide who love each other in their disagreements. But it is easy to slip. It is easy for us to use language like, "May what unites us be

stronger than what divides us.” I think I said something like that in our prayer meeting this week, but it is up to us now to live those words.

As we deal with our emotions and look for ways to move forward, it is good that we remind ourselves of the humility of Jesus aligning Himself with the sinner. It is for us to embrace that humility, to own it for ourselves. And remember that in our baptism we lay down our idols and whatever idolatry is for each of us. And we know our politics, just like anything else, can become an idol. In our baptism, anything we treasure more than God is put aside to follow and live into our daily discipleship. May our dialogue be filled with the humility of the baptized Jesus, with the powerful love of God and the peace of The Holy Spirit.

I want to end with the wonderful words of the first verse of the old hymn *O God Of Every Nation*, which incidentally I was led to by the same friend who pointed me to *The Godfather*, I have wise friends. But before I do that, if you have been listening and you have not been baptized and have an interest, please feel free to catch me afterwards or chat to Pastor Joy when she returns to the office this week.

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of every race and land,
redeem the whole creation
with your almighty hand;
where hate and fear divide us
and bitter threats are hurled,
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And the people of God say AMEN!



LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Brian Mitchell

January 10, 2021

Holy Water: Jesus' Baptism

Mark 1 :4-11

This morning's lectionary passage is from the Gospel of Mark Chapter 1, verse 4 through 11. The baptism of Jesus. Today's lectionary passage comes to us in a week when we may need to hear words of hope. It comes to us in a week when we may need to hear words of peace. It comes to us in a week when we may need to switch off from all that has been surrounding us in the news and almost every conversation we have had. It comes to us when we may just need rest, to be in the presence of God and our sisters and brothers in Christ. It comes to us in a week when we may want answers, when we need to engage in the issues of the week and hear how God's word speaks to our souls and to our country.

Whatever your need is this morning I hope that in the words of scripture found in Mark concerning Jesus' baptism we will find some hope and peace and words to help us move forward.

Over the last few weeks as we have celebrated the birth of Jesus we have looked at how the Gospel writers have begun Jesus' story. We have seen Mary and Joseph and shepherds and magi and angels and creation. But when we look at Mark, the Gospel begins with Jesus entering the story as a grown man. His baptism is the first scene in His life that Mark shares with us.

First a word about The Gospel of Mark. Most scholars think of Mark as the first of the Gospels to be written. We think it may very have been written in a time of Roman persecution, probably for the community of Christians in Rome. Those early believers may have been somewhat underground, blamed by some for the great fire in Rome. Just a few decades after the ascension of Jesus to the Father, they were looking forward to Jesus' return in glory. Like the Jews earlier in that century, they wanted the Messiah to come and deliver them from Roman oppressors. The Gospel was written to provide hope and stability for the believers.

So let's read our passage for the day.

4 John the baptizer appeared[a] in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 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. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 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. 8 I have baptized you with[b] water; but he will baptize you with[c] the Holy Spirit."
9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 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. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; [d] with you I am well pleased."

It begs the question, why did Jesus need to be baptized? Why does this perfect man, the Son of God need the baptism of repentance that John was preaching? It's a good question and one that John himself asks. In Mark's account, John says he is not fit to untie the thong of His sandals, but in Matthew's account of Jesus baptism we have a little more conversation.

John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

To fulfill all righteousness. Perhaps Jesus had Isaiah 53: 11 in mind, which says:

**"Out of his anguish he shall see light;
he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.
The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.**

He understood for all to be made righteous he had to align with the people who were being baptized. Certainly, this was Jesus grand entrance onto the scene. It was His announcement of the beginning of His ministry. It was a definitive moment in His life. His baptism establishes His identity and authority. It was also His time of being approved and equipped by God.

But it is his aligning with those who need to be baptized that catches my attention. Jesus' baptism shows that He identified with sinners. His baptism symbolized the sinners' baptism into the righteousness of Christ, dying with Him and rising free from sin and able to walk in the newness of life. His perfect righteousness would fulfill all the requirements of the Law for sinners who could never hope to do so on their own. When Jesus says that it was proper to "fulfill all righteousness" by this He is referring to the righteousness that He provides to all who come to Him to exchange their sin for His righteousness.

There is also incredible humility in the baptism of Jesus. He did not need to do this. But He wants to announce who He is and be aligned with the people.

Then we have this wonderful scene, when Jesus comes out of the water, where the heavens are torn open and the voice of God saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove. It is a wonderful image of the trinity as The Father speaks and The Spirit descends on The Son as a dove.

The verb used for the heavens being torn apart is only used one other time in the Gospel, when the temple curtain is torn in two from top to bottom when Jesus died. It implies a violent invasion of God into a sinful world. The heavens are torn apart not to allow us a vision of God but to allow God's power to become present in Jesus. It is a dramatic picture that Mark paints. It is supposed to grab our attention. This man being baptized is one with God and has the power of God upon Him.

As Jesus aligns himself with those who need repentance, it allows them to also align themselves with Him.

And if those folks find righteousness in His righteousness, is it too much to hear the words of God and

for them to also receive those words.

If we align ourselves with Jesus through baptism, if we find righteousness in His righteousness, is it too much for us to hear the words of God for Jesus and accept them for us.

Now don't get me wrong. When the heavens were torn open, those words spoken were for Jesus as He was baptized. But if we live in that righteousness found in Jesus, we must not be afraid to hear those words for ourselves. It would be good for us all to write that phrase from God on our hearts. Think on those words for you. **You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.**

When you feel less than, when you are not sure you can do this faith, when you are hurt, when you have hurt, when you are overwhelmed, remember your righteousness is found in Jesus and because of that, you are His Beloved Child and with you God is pleased.

You may remember your baptism; you may have made vows yourself as you were baptized. There may have been others who made those vows for you, many of you have made those baptismal vows for others. You have promised as a congregation to raise the children of this church in the faith.

Those promises and vows mean something. It is not just a ritual that we need to go through. It is not a meaningless act to keep family members happy. It is a solemn promise to live a new life in Jesus and with Jesus. It is a solemn vow to raise our children in the faith. Some would claim baptism is required for salvation. I do not see that in scripture, but I do believe it is an act of obedience and it is aligning ourselves with Jesus who knew how important it was for Him to be baptized regardless of His need of repentance.

It is important that we take our baptismal promises and vows seriously and we live that baptismal life.

I was reminded by a friend this week of that baptism scene in *The Godfather*, one of the most powerful scenes in cinematic history, where Michael Corleone is renouncing Satan and all his works while all the heads of the other families are being killed at Michael's command. It is a powerful scene which reminds us that it is too easy to make a mockery of our baptismal vows.

The language about heaven being torn apart is found in Isaiah 64 when the prophet cries out,

**O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence."**

I am sure many of us this week found ourselves wishing God would tear open the heavens and come down so the mountains would quake at His presence.

We have been angry, outraged, embarrassed, defensive, disappointed. We have yelled, we have cried, we may even have tried to hold civil conversations. We have certainly been active on social media. We have felt helpless, motivated to bring change, we have wondered what comes next for our great country. Many have stopped to pray, to listen, to bring comfort.

We have LPC members on both sides of the political divide who love each other in their disagreements. But it is easy to slip. It is easy for us to use language like, "May what unites us be

stronger than what divides us.” I think I said something like that in our prayer meeting this week, but it is up to us now to live those words.

As we deal with our emotions and look for ways to move forward, it is good that we remind ourselves of the humility of Jesus aligning Himself with the sinner. It is for us to embrace that humility, to own it for ourselves. And remember that in our baptism we lay down our idols and whatever idolatry is for each of us. And we know our politics, just like anything else, can become an idol. In our baptism, anything we treasure more than God is put aside to follow and live into our daily discipleship. May our dialogue be filled with the humility of the baptized Jesus, with the powerful love of God and the peace of The Holy Spirit.

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