

Our second scripture reading for today comes from the Gospel According to Mark. Chapter 1. The bulletin and the slide say beginning with the 4th verse, but I'm going to start with verse 1.

1 The beginning of the good news[a] of Jesus Christ.[b]

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,[c]

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,[d]
 who will prepare your way,
 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
 'Prepare the way of the Lord;
 make his paths straight,' "

4 so John the baptizer appeared[a] in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And the whole Judean region 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 strap of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with[b] water, but he will baptize you with[c] the Holy Spirit."

The Baptism of Jesus

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 upon him. 11 And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved;[d] with you I am well pleased."

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God

Let us Pray.

Gracious and loving God, our dear parent, your son our savior, and the descending dove and holy spirit, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable, may they be well pleasing, in your sight, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I remember well, being in Sunday School, and given the riddle, how can you balance 66 books in one hand?

Well, you pick up a bible.

One of the things I love about the bible is that it is polyphonic, with many voices, offering a variety of perspectives that help us to learn about a divine and transcendent God, who is never fully known in our earthly lives.

One of the greatest examples of this is the Christmas story, the beginning of each of the Gospels.

Luke and Matthew offer narratives about Jesus' birth.

Matthew starts with a genealogy, Luke starts with the birth of Jesus' cousin John the Baptist

John provides a beginning that is cosmic, and starts with the high christological prologue, in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God; but offering no explanation of Jesus' birth beyond the incarnational affirmation of the word made flesh.

Mark, however, does not offer a theological prologue, an account of a birth, or even a lineage.

In Mark's account the good news begins with a voice in the wilderness, John the baptist offering a baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins, and Jesus shows up to be baptized.

Mark gets right down to business. By the end of the first Chapter of Mark admittedly chapters and verses were added years later, yet by the end of the first chapter of Mark

Jesus is baptized, tempted in the wilderness,

Returns from the wilderness proclaiming the good news of God. 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Jesus calls his first disciples

He casts out a demon

Heals simon's mother-in-law who took a fever

He is reported to heal many, as the entire town gathered

He takes a retreat to pray in solitude

"he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons"

All Before healing a man with leprosy as the last story Mark relays in the first chapter.

Mark wastes no time.

And throughout the shortest, and in most scholars opinions, earliest written account of Jesus life and ministry, this good news, there is an immense sense of urgency.

And it all starts with Jesus' Baptism by John. A baptism that is of repentance and for the forgiveness of sins.

Which is a little curious... what does the son of God, the ultimate teacher, the messiah need to repent of, what forgiveness is offered to Jesus in this moment.

I'm not sure,

But in that dramatic scene:

As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. 11 And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved;[d] with you I am well pleased."

And from there, no time is wasted ...

Jesus is tested, tempted, in the wilderness, and begins his ministry; as the beloved son.

Baptism in our Christian understanding, is not just for the repentance and forgiveness of sins which it absolutely is,

it is a recognition that we are part of God's family, it is a sign of being included and initiated into the church,

It is also a recognition that we are joined and united with Jesus' baptism.

So what happens in Jesus' Baptism: the heavens are torn open, the Holy Spirit descends, Jesus' is named as beloved, and God announces him well pleased

And from there Jesus' ministry begins with urgency.

So as we think about our own baptisms, let us think about how what happened at Jesus trip to the Jordan, and have faith that by the power of the Holy Spirit, those things happen to us

How baptism is a sign that we are connected into the life of Jesus christ; that we are grafted into the body of Christ.

a body on which the Holy Spirit still descends, a body that is named as beloved, a body in which God is well pleased, ,

and a body that is called to ministry that continues with urgency

And the world is in need of the Good news, of the kingdom being near, of healing, feeding, peace, compassion, and mercy.

One does not need to look far to find places of illness, of violence, of hunger.

We are going to remember the life of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as a country tomorrow; yet many of the systemic sins of racism, classism, and unchecked military aggression are just as pervasive.

And so recognizing that the world needs good news and it needs it urgently, and the baptism of Jesus, that we are remembering today, along with our own, begins and sends us out into that ministry.

The PCUSA Book of order, has a lot to say about baptism, it is a deep well of theological meaning.

One of those many meanings that is contained in that part of our denominations constitutions is

“The baptism of believers witnesses to the truth that God’s gift of grace calls for our grateful response”

God’s gift of grace calls for our grateful response.

Our grateful response is to love our neighbors, to feed the hungry, to worship with joy, to work for a better and more just world, and so we are working on it. Our grateful response is to be actively engaged in ministry.

We are installing deacons and elders as one of our expressions of that ministry in this service, as a recognition that the world needs the good news of the kingdom and whether you are one of our officers getting installed, whether you have previously served on session or as a deacon, whether you live into ministry in another way,

because you are loved, you are offered grace, and now you are called to respond.

Amen.