

- The Beginning of the Gospel

Mark 1:1-8; (Isaiah 40:1-11)

Sunday, December 10, 2023 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction

Mark is the Gospel that “gets right to the point.” Believed to be heavily influenced by the preaching of Peter, Mark spends no time on the birth of Jesus and gets to action right away. The words “baptize” or “baptism” show up more than once in the passage, so baptism, for Peter, is right at the beginning of the Gospel, the story of redemption in Christ. A Pentecostal pastor by the name of David Fox wrote this about the Sacrament of Baptism. “Baptism” comes from the Greek word- “Baptismo” which means to immerse or dunk. .Baptismo is a word which was used to describe: a) Sinking ships as they sank water would fill the inside of ship. b) Another usage describes a garment being immersed into dye... the dye penetrates every fiber of the fabric. So when Jesus and John The Baptist said, “You will be baptized in the H.S.” they are saying all your insides will be filled” with the Holy Spirit, fundamentally recreating you as a new person. The Bible reveals the work of the Holy Spirit symbolized in the Sacrament of Baptism as the beginning of the Gospel in Mark. The passage makes three fundamental characteristics of the new person in Christ (there are more) that our posture before God and before people demonstrates.\*

- Set the Stage

Mark has the story of our Lord begin with John the Baptist and with baptism, and what that represents figures large in the beginning of this Gospel. John is preaching in the wilderness and people are coming to hear him preach. They respond by confessing their sins and by baptism, normally used as a rite to enter Judaism, now a rite used to enter the Kingdom of God.

- Main Point: Baptism is a new way of life.

Baptism is a new way of life, that involves honesty before God, honor before God and dependence upon God. There are corollaries in human relationships as well: honesty with people, humility before people, and less dependence upon people in that we recognize their frailties as well as our own.

- Be open and vulnerable before God

Mark 1:4-5 "John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins."

When it comes before honesty before God, we have to be willing not only to envision the Almighty as He is, to the best of our ability, but also be honest and open about who are, both the bad and the good within us. I found this strange story about honesty and accountability in the sad case of George Wilson. “In 1829 a man named George Wilson was arrested for robbery and murder in a US mail heist. He was tried, convicted and sentenced to death by hanging. Some friends intervened on his behalf and were able to obtain his pardon from President Andrew Jackson. But when told of this, Wilson refused it saying he wanted to die. Well, the sheriff didn’t know what to do, how do you execute a man officially pardoned? An appeal was made to the President who perplexed, turned the matter over to the US Supreme court. Chief Justice John

Marshall gave this ruling: A pardon is a piece of paper, the value of which depends on its acceptance by the person implicated. Anyone under the sentence of death would hardly be expected to refuse a pardon, but if it's refused, it's no pardon. Thus, George Wilson was executed while his signed pardon lay on the sheriff's desk." While I will never understand why Mr. Wilson refused the pardon, even while walking the steps of the gallows, I appreciate his honesty. It is that honesty that is healthy before God.\*\* The honesty before God also comes with a desire, indeed a necessity, to honor God as is His due.

- Be honoring to God

Mark 1:7 "And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose." Removing the sandals of the head of house was the lowest duty of the most menial servant. John was right to say that, but note that Jesus, later on, did that very same thing to Peter and the disciples when He washed their feet. Our Lord demonstrates humility. It should engender reverence

- Be dependent on God

Mark 1:8 "I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." There is nothing we can do that will have any benefit to the plan and will of God unless the Holy Spirit is involved. This fact should influence our prayers and our conversations about the church. We need the Holy Spirit to move in our midst or we can do nothing. Those are the three points revealed in baptism in this chapter. There are three corollaries.

- Application

Be open and honest with people as well. (Mark 1:4-5) There are times when one must keep a confidence, but for the most part relationships thrive with honesty. Be transparent and be yourself. Speak the truth, but speak the truth in love.

Be humble enough to count the needs and the hope for justice of others as important as yourself. (Mark 1:7) This echoes a similar theme from the book of Philippians. In a world of self promotion, be the person who promotes others.

Be less dependent upon people. Even good people can let you down. (Mark 1:8) This one may seem a little counter-intuitive, but people will let you down. Even good people who are honorable and honest will let you down. Even people who truly care about you can let you down. We all have our weaknesses, so don't put someone on a pedestal, because they are human and can fall. Only the Lord is always faithful.

- Conclusion

The beginning of the Gospel in Mark starts with John the Baptist and with baptism. There is much for us to learn, but the beginning of this Gospel, and the Sacrament of Baptism, teaches to be honest with God, to honor God humbly and to depend upon the Holy Spirit. Likewise, we also should be honest and transparent with each other, to promote one another instead of ourselves, and realize that even the best people can fall short. There is all that and more in the Beginning of the Gospel.

\*<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/4520/baptism-by-david-fox>

\*\*<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/30273/in-1829-a-man-named-george-wilson-was-arrested-by-bruce-willis>