

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 01/07/2024



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Baptism of the Lord

Revised Common Lectionary Year B

Sunday, January 7th

Mark 1:4-11

Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Remember your Baptism

The opening of Mark's Gospel (1:1-8) was covered in the lectionary text for the Second Sunday of Advent just a few weeks ago. The emphasis of this commentary is limited to vv.9-11 – the Baptism of Jesus. Moses rashly anticipated his divine call to deliver his people from bondage by taking matters into his own hands and killing the Egyptian beating the Hebrew slave. This led to forty years of obscurity (Exodus 2:11f). Jesus, however, is obedient to God's will and timing before He is commissioned into ministry.

Mark 1:4-11 Commentary

⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The Baptism of Jesus Parallel Accounts

Matthew 3:13-17	Mark 1:9-11	Luke 3:21-22
<p>¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.</p> <p>¹⁴ 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 thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.</p> <p>¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized,</p>	<p>⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee</p> <p>and was baptized by John in the Jordan.</p>	<p>²¹ Now when all the people were baptized,</p> <p>and when Jesus also had been baptized</p> <p>and was praying,</p> <p>the heavens were opened,</p>

<p>immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him,</p> <p>and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him;</p> <p>¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."</p>	<p>¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open</p> <p>and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.</p> <p>¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."</p>	<p>²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove;</p> <p>and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."</p>
---	---	---

⁹ *In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.*

If v.1 is considered a title, v.9 is the first scene in which Jesus is introduced. The expression "*In those days*" is common literal expression used in Mark as a "seam" to connect stories of Jesus together. The person who John refers to as "*He who is mightier than I*" in v.7 is clearly Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus moved from the Galilean town of Nazareth where grew up in obscurity to the place where God was making things happen in the wilderness. It is interesting to note how the crowds came from Judea and Jerusalem (v.5) while Jesus came from the north - an insignificant town in Galilee. There was much distrust and hostility between Judea and Galilee, particularly over religious matters. In Mark's typical matter-of-fact manner, we read that Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan. There is no further explanation given in Mark.

We go to Matthew for some additional background. Unlike Mark's Gentile audience, Matthew's original audience comprised of Jewish Christians and thus he emphasizes the purpose of the Baptism in Jesus' own words (the first recorded words Jesus spoke in Matthew's Gospel) which was to "*fulfill all righteousness*" (Matthew 3:15). This statement requires some explanation. Turning now to Luke's Gospel, Luke points out how Jesus as a baby and His parents performed everything according to the "*Law of the Lord*" which involved circumcision, purification, and presentation (Luke 2:21-40). Luke makes no mention of the Baptism having any "*righteousness*" implications. However, in Matthew's Gospel, "*fulfill*" is often used in the context of fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. "*Righteousness*" is often used in the context of obedience to God. Jesus' Baptism by John was not a law requirement of the Mosaic Law but a submission to the will of God. Jesus did not need to be baptized. Unlike Moses who prematurely took matters into his own hands and failed to rely on God's timing, Jesus begins His ministry in complete submission and obedience to the Father.

¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

The adverb *euthys* (immediately; at once) is used for the first time in v.10. This is a characteristic of Mark's Gospel being found 11 times in the first chapter and 37 times in the whole Gospel narrative. The use of this adverb creates a dramatic and breathless pace that rushes the reader towards the cross. Things only slow down in Passion Week. The idea of the heavens opening have parallels to Ezekiel's commissioning as a prophet at the same age (Ezekiel 1:1). Mark includes more dramatic language, "*the heavens being torn open.*" The only other place *schizō* (torn) is used in Mark is when the curtain of the temple is torn in two, from top to bottom (15:38). The heavens and the veil being torn thus bookend Jesus' ministry. The descent of the Holy Spirit alludes back to v.8 and the prophetic expectation that the Messiah is endowed with God's Spirit (Isaiah 11:2; 42:1; 61:1). The descent of the Spirit and His Father's approval is a clear indication of Jesus being anointed for a specific ministry.

Reflection and Action

In Mark's story of Jesus' baptism, Jesus is revealed as God's Beloved Son or God's Son, the Beloved. Mark is not writing a mystery novel – he puts it out there right in the beginning in v.1 and v.11. What this actually means takes the rest of the Gospel to work out. While Jesus' baptism is hardly the prototype of our own baptism, Mark's story naturally encourages us to reflect on our own baptism. With the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus and eventually being poured out into the world, we can be baptized with the Holy Spirit into the community of the Church that was itself brought into being by the same Holy Spirit. This is the baptism that John referred to in v.8. Our baptism thus calls us to live out the life that follows Jesus' path.

Mark's Gospel begins with the ministry of John the Baptist which is grounded in the Old Testament prophecies of Isaiah and Malachi. One could argue that all these and subsequent events relate back to the *proto-euangelion* of Genesis 3:15 where ultimately the seed of the woman will triumph over the seed of the serpent. Just as God had an orderly approach to the creation of the Universe, there is a specific plan and order to the redemption of that creation. The ministry of Jesus is part of this orderly plan established by our Triune God just as there is order to our salvation (Romans 8:29-30). Jesus, as the perfect human and at the same time fully divine, submitted to the will of God in moving out from Galilee to encounter John in the wilderness and submit to his baptism. As a result of this baptism, Jesus is divinely commissioned for His ministry. The rest is His-story and our future yet to come.

There is a clear contrast here between Jesus' submission to God's will and timing and Moses' initially false start to his ministry when he took matters into his own hands. In our time and place in salvation history we are witnessing a rather strange phenomenon. There are people in the secular world today attempting to build Christ's Kingdom without Christ! Non-believers are attempting to bring about the fruits of the Kingdom, such as justice, compassion, and equality, by their own efforts. Like all previous attempts to achieve such through human effort alone, it is doomed to failure. Without Christ and the Holy Spirit, these efforts quickly deteriorate into judgmentalism, legalism, forced compliance, persecution, and eventual jack-booted totalitarianism. As the history of the twentieth century has taught us, such failures often cost the lives of tens of millions and result in the misery of hundreds of millions, if not billions, of others.

Many in the church are supporting such self-sanctified secular endeavors that are ultimately aimed at revolution. We need only go back to the social gospel era and see the problems that resulted. While grounded in good intent, we somehow ended up with some churches in full support of the eugenics movement as a means of ushering in the Kingdom. The Kingdom is not built by external revolution (even though it is revolutionary) but by internal transformation. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that leads to the inner change of heart. It is this vital transformative force that Christ brings to the world. The Kingdom is built according to God's timing and blueprints, not by sword nor totalitarian government but by the Holy Spirit working through ordinary believers.

As we begin 2024, there will be many temptations to quench the Holy Spirit because of fear resulting from the growing persecution of Christianity and the existing divisiveness in the world. It is during these challenging times that we must claim the promises God made to us at our baptism. We must put on Christ and courageously carry-on Christ's Spirit-filled mission by responding as a community through works of love, justice, and mercy – regardless of what the external conditions may be. In addition to fear, we must also guard against those times of unrest, uncertainty, and seeming injustice when we are tempted to get out in front of the Holy Spirit and take matters into our own hands. Instead, we must first look to see where the Holy Spirit is at work in our immediate world and join in! Like the old military adage, we must move to the sound of the guns or move to the sound of the roar.