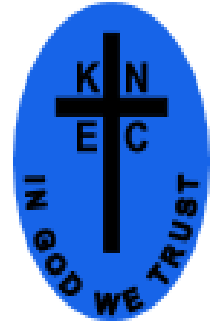




Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

www.knec4jesus.org.uk



Reading Mark 1 : 4-11

Sermon: 3 January 2010

Sermon

¹⁰ As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." ¹

Mark is the oldest Gospel in our Bible. Both Matthew and Luke made some use of Mark as a source for their own accounts of Jesus. It is also remarkable on how these three Gospels differ on their recollection of events. Mark does not have a Christmas story like Matthew and Luke. But what is remarkable that Mark took the message of Christmas and made it his own. Christmas is about the coming of Christ, Immanuel God with us here and now! And this is exactly what Mark is telling us with the Baptism of Jesus. God is assuring humankind that He is with us in Christ! He came near to us in Christ and through Christ we are part of a relationship with him.

Mark says a few things that need some explanation for us living today.

He says that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee to be baptised. Just a few sentences earlier on it was said that everyone had to turn away from their sins in order to be baptised. Now Jesus comes from Galilee, the province the Jews regarded as sinful because it was the place where the heathens, the Gentiles stay. Galilee was of course the border province of Israel to Syria. "Nazareth" was such an obscure village that it is not mentioned in the Old Testament, or any other non-Biblical literature. Matthew 2:23; Luke 2:39-40; 4:16 indicate it was Jesus' hometown. Mark probably implies that. The "Jordan" is only a little over two hundred miles long. Only in flood stage is it more than a hundred feet wide or ten feet deep, and it can be easily crossed in numerous places. None of the Gospels gives any indication where along the Jordan the baptism took place.

Mark is also known as the Gospel who almost hides the secret about Jesus' true identity till the end. It is only at the end of the Gospel that the disciples realize who Jesus really was. In this passage something of this secrecy comes to the forefront because it is only Christ that hears and sees the supernatural manifestations when he comes up out of the water. The true identity of Jesus is concealed from the characters of the story.

Three things set **Jesus** apart from all others who had been baptized. First, **He saw heaven being torn open**. The forceful verb, "being torn open" (in Greek *schizomenous*, "split") reflects a metaphor for God's breaking into human experience to deliver His people.

¹ *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984, S. Mk 1:10-11

Second, He saw **the Spirit descending on Him like a dove**, in a visible dovelike form, not in a dovelike way. The dove imagery probably symbolized the Spirit's creative activity according to Genesis 1 vers 2. In Old Testament times the Spirit came on certain people to empower them for service. The coming of the Spirit on Jesus empowered Him for His messianic mission and the task of baptizing others with the Spirit, as John predicted. The descent of the Spirit is suggested by Isa 61:1, but the source of the comparison of the Spirit to a dove is uncertain because the Old Testament never, and rabbinic literature but rarely, makes the association.

Third, Jesus heard **a voice . . . from heaven** (cf. 9:7). The words, expressed God's unqualified approval of Jesus and His mission. In the first declaration, **You are My Son**, the words "You are" affirm Jesus' unique sonship with the Father. The significance of these words is found in Psalm 2:7 where God addressed the anointed King as His Son. At His baptism Jesus began His official role as God's Anointed One. The second clause, **whom I love**, is literally, "the Beloved One" (ho agapētos). As a title it stresses the intensity of love between God the Father and the Son without losing its descriptive force. As an adjective, it can be understood in the Old Testament sense of an "only" Son. The words **with You I am well pleased** point to the kind of kingly Son Jesus was to be in His earthly mission. These words come from Isaiah 42:1 in which God addressed His Servant whom He had chosen, the One in whom He delights, and on whom He had put His Spirit.

Mark is telling his readers and us that Jesus is the expected Son of God. At the baptism God himself affirmed that Jesus is his Son. The striking message is: God touched our world our reality with his presence! God came very near to everyone who believes in Him!

In our day people tend to freak out when it comes to meeting celebrities. I heard once the lady Provost of Edinburgh speaking about her meeting with the worlds leading astronauts in the city. She said that she could hardly believe that she was actually meeting these famous people who have experienced space! When she touched one astronaut's hand, she realized that she touched his reality; it was as if her hand was actually also in space! She said thereafter she did not want to wash her hand...Just as she had a collective experience with the astronaut, so do we have a collective/mutual experience with Christ. It is as if you and I are seeing and hearing the words and vision Jesus heard and experienced every time we assemble before God through faith. It is as if the heavens also open and God is telling us that we are his beloved Children.

And the words of God are so comforting. It is comforting to know that we are in Christ the Beloved Children of God, especially during times that we go through suffering and turmoil. It is then that this message becomes powerful and meaningful. It is then that we get renewed strength to carry on with our respective journeys.

I also think that we can use the metaphor of Jesus in the water to understand our own circumstances. Sometimes we as believers find ourselves also in the deep waters, grasping for breath. Sometimes it is as though our world plunges us in the deep end of everything. Mothers have to cope with a family and work. Fathers have to cope with finances, work tensions, and a family. Children have to cope with the pressure of friends, unrealistic expectations from their parents and an enormous load of schoolwork. Pensioners often have to cope with their "unhappy", "overworked" children and grandchildren and even their finances. Our world has no sympathy for someone that is lying down. There is no respect for family life. There is no time for "honest" love and caring. Everyone must just make it to the top – wherever that may be! So if you feel that you are drowning because of the pressures of this world lift up your head and experience the comforting words of God. You are his Beloved child for whom He cares and loves. And if you struggle to cope after a broken relationship, just focus on the comforting words. You belong to Him, the Almighty God who knows your pain and hurt. He will help you.

And if you struggle with sickness, ill health, or undergoing some harsh medical treatment, listen again to the words of God. You are his child. Just like any parent, He will do everything in His power to help you in whatever way. He is there when you experience pain or are feeling hopeless. He is there when you have no-one to talk to. He is there when you feel you are drowning

If you are struggling with depression and a low self esteem, read the words of God in the passage over and over again. You are important to God. Never think that you are not important or unworthy in his eyes. You belong to him...the King of all Kings. He is reaching out to you. He will keep you safe in his loving arms.

If you are dying of a terminal illness, just have faith in the Lord. He will come and take you away when the time is ready. But until that day have hope and trust the Lord. He will not let you carry a burden that is too heavy for you to handle!

Whatever your circumstances may be, remember the words of God who says to you and me: "You are my own dear child. I am pleased with you." Nothing can separate us from the love of God through Jesus Christ. May we always walk in faith to experience how God touches our reality...

Amen