

John & Jesus
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Mark 1: 4 – 11

⁴ John the baptizer appeared 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 water; but he will baptize you with 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; with you I am well pleased."

In the gospel of Mark, we meet Jesus in the 9th verse.

Just nine verses in.

And when we meet Jesus here, in Mark, he is full grown, ready to get going.

Mark does not have
 angels or
 shepherds or
 genealogies or
 theological treatises.

It is the shortest of the four gospels by some 4,000 words.

It's a Tiny House on a suburban cul-de-sac.¹

Mark sees no advantage in implication, insinuation, or indications.

He writes a lean story, and gets right to the point.

Isaiah, John the Baptist, and Jesus, the Son of God.

Jesus. The Son of God.

From the very beginning we know exactly where we are.

Jesus is the Son of God.

It is not a mystery revealed, it is foundational knowledge for Mark, revealed through the event of Jesus' baptism.

Jesus' baptism is a little bit different from the baptisms we normally see here.

Baptisms of babies.

recognizing the love that

¹ Tiny houses are usually no more (and often much less) than 500 square feet.
<http://www.fyi.tv/shows/tiny-house-nation/about/season-1>
<http://www.tumbleweedhouses.com>

God has already placed in their hearts,
 grace given,
 the community with which
 they have already been surrounded,
 and the claim which God has already placed upon them,
 and nurturing that until they are ready to take those vows for themselves.

Jesus' baptism is something different.
 We have what Mark tells us,
 and we have what Jesus shows us.
 Less promise and more proclamation.
 Less recognition and more reorientation.
 Reorientation, to tell us that things are going to be different.

Jesus, who has no sins to confess,
 is baptized by the one who is the servant.

As scholar Donald Juel has written, in Mark, there is,² "the king who does not look like a king; the one who will baptize who is baptized; the one in whose ministry God comes frighteningly close. In light of these images, the dynamics of the unfolding drama make sense. We are offered a glimpse of what this good news is about -- and what it will cost."

Because it will cost a lot.
 Everything.
 Which is the other thing that the hearers of this text would have known.
 Where this story was heading: to the cross.

Following Jesus will change your life.
 It has changed the world, and needs to change it more.
 It means you will restructure your priorities
 and make different choices and dig deeper than you thought possible.

Why? Because you believe in Jesus.
 In the love of God so powerful that God wasn't content to send messengers,
 God came God self, Jesus the Christ.
 To show the way.

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,

When it says that the heavens are torn apart?

² Donald Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted*, p. 42.

Found in Brian Stoffregen's exegetical notes on this passage, <http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/mark1x4.htm>

This isn't Monty Python-esque opening of the clouds.³
 The heavens are rent. Split.
 This is tearing, ripping apart.
 God is loose in the world.

The heavens are torn open.
 God is loosed on the world.

And the voice?
 It is not a whisper.
 It is not a melodious or the sound of an orator.
 It is a voice crying out. Shouting out.

Elsewhere in the gospel Mark⁴ uses this verb to describe a voice crying in the wilderness.
 The sound of an unclean spirit being expelled.
 And when, on the cross, this is the word to describe how Jesus calls out to God.

It is NOT this still small voice that God uses other places in the Bible.

And what does it say? *"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."*

This was not God speaking to the masses,
 this was God the Holy Spirit calling out to the son.
 Telling Jesus what was true. So Jesus could **show** the people.

Show them. That we are not on our own, we are a part of the kingdom of God. The Body of Christ.

Jesus, here, is baptized by his cousin. In the presence of "people from all over the Judean countryside.

Not his mother or grandparents, aunts and uncles.

People from all over.

But now, his brothers and sisters.

It's a whole new way of seeing family. Connections.



³

⁴ From Mark Davis' blog: "Left Behind and Loving It"
 January, 2015 entry entitled "The Sky Tearing and a Voice Crying."
<http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2015/01/the-sky-tearing-and-voice-crying.html>

Baptism redefines what it means to be family.

Now here, in this church, we know something about family.

There are newcomers in our midst. I'm one of them. But many of you aren't new. You've been around. And even you haven't fully separated all of the strands that connect you as cousins and aunts and nephews, greats and grands. Firsts and twice removed.

This is no less true for Jesus, but when he comes up from the water and hears that voice, when Mark tells us what happened, family is redefined.

We are family.

And what wouldn't you do for family?

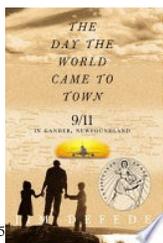
That's exactly the point.

On September 11, 2001, most of us had our eyes glued to the horrible, horrible news coverage out of New York City. And Washington, D.C., and rural Pennsylvania. But it wasn't the only place things were happening.

In a matter of moments, all of the planes that were flying, 4,546 planes, carrying business people and job seekers and vacationers had to find a place to land. Immediately. And some of the biggest airports in the East Coast were closed.

Gander, Newfoundland⁵, population 10,000 found itself, due to being a place where planes would historically refuel for an overseas flight, found itself host to 38 of those planes. 6,595 people. They didn't know if there were terrorists on board those planes. They had no way of knowing who was there. There was, it was discovered along the way, an executive for Hugo Boss. A high ranking United States military official. A Nigerian princess. A family bringing home their newly adopted child from Russia, a child that did not speak English. A family from the middle east, bringing his four-year-old son to the United States for surgery. In one school shelter there were residents from more than 40 countries, from Sri Lanka to Tasmania, Ireland to Mozambique. And rather than allowing the events of the day bring out their worst, it brought out their best. For almost a week the people of Gander cared for them, the guests they didn't know were coming.

The residents stripped their beds of sheets and towels to take to the local shelters- schools and local halls. Businesses emptied their shelves to give people whatever they needed.



⁵ DeFede, Jim. *The Day the World Came to Town: 9/11 in Gander, Newfoundland*. HarperCollins, 2011. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gander,_Newfoundland_and_Labrador

The shared telephones, linens, internet access. Tears, hands, and shoulders.

Prescriptions. "Many of the passengers had packed their prescription medication away in their luggage before leaving Europe. Since all of their bags were still on the plane, they were desperate to have those prescriptions replaced while they were stranded. In most cases, the passengers didn't have their actual prescriptions with them. In each case...the... pharmacists had to call the hometown doctor or pharmacist so they would know the exact medication and dosage....During one stretch... [the pharmacists] worked forty-two hours straight, [because there is no universal standard for naming or dosing prescription medicines].... [spending] hours on the Internet, and work[ing] with the local hospital and Canadian health officials, to sort through the maze of prescriptions and find the right drugs for each passenger. In the first twenty-four hours, pharmacists in Gander filled more than a thousand prescriptions. All at no cost to the passengers."

The mother of a firefighter who lost his life in lower Manhattan on that day, but it would take days for her to receive that word. As she waited, she was surrounded by love and care, compassion and as much support as she could receive.

One of the plane passengers noticed that three of her group hadn't eaten in more than 24 hours. When she inquired as to why they told her that they were Orthodox Jews, and the meals weren't kosher. They didn't want to complain and hadn't said anything. The woman who had noticed it brought it to the attention of Gander resident Eithne Smith. Within an hour there were kosher meals for this group and within a few hours more they had been given the faculty lounge to use for the duration of their stay, the rabbi of the group turning it into a kosher kitchen. Reflecting upon this, Eithne wished they had thought of asking for kosher meals without being prompted. The truth is, there just aren't a lot of Jewish people in Newfoundland. The island is 98 percent Catholic and Protestant, and the only synagogue in the province is more than two hundred miles away in St. John's.

Patsy Vey worked at the Sears in the mall at Gander. She was driving to work when she saw two flight attendants walking on the sidewalk. She pulled over and offered them a ride. And then she told them they would be welcome to use her car for the rest of the day. The flight attendants, not sure what to do with this offer, declined. Patsy told them that as long as they were there her car was theirs to use. And they didn't even need to ask- she left the keys in the ignition.

The book I read about this week, "The Day the Word Came to Town," is page after page of examples like this.

And what I love even more about this book is that the people in it, the almost 17,000 people, don't become saints overnight. It turns out some of them get grumpy. Some of the passengers have different ideas about how they should proceed. It's honest, but they don't give in. They rise up, look around, and take care of one another in the good moments AND the tough ones.

Because they were, we are, family.

It is a modern-day parable like no other that describes the kind of thing Jesus was establishing on the day when he was baptized. That we belong to one another. We are God's children. You. Me. All of US.

Mark is telling us that Jesus is the son of God.

Jesus is showing us that we are all God's children, loved and valued. No matter where we are from, no matter what our genealogy.

And this is a truth

that can stay with us on the darkest nights,

the most wilderness places where we don't know what is true, when we don't think we can hold fast to anything,

anything onto which we can hold fast, the words of the Spirit spoken to Jesus point to a truth that

always, always, always holds fast to you.⁶

God will always seek you, embrace you.

And if we know this, we need to embrace, care for, one another.

What Mark tells us.

What Jesus shows us.

Changes everything.

The word that came from God now rests with us: to hear, to learn, to live, and to share.

And with God's help, we will tell and show it, too.

⁶ The words of the benediction used every week at University Presbyterian Church by the Rev. Dr. Robert Dunham.