

I AM PLEASED WITH YOU
Mark 1: 4
January 10, 2021...The Baptism of the Lord
Eastminster Presbyterian Church

Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, John the Baptist announces that he is the one who has come to prepare the way for the Lord's coming. With the return, the Jewish people expected the ousting of the Romans. But God had other plans. Mark makes it clear that there were high expectations for the Messiah, Jesus. The question: Would Jesus conform to the expectations of his time or reveal a different plan from God?

John prepared for the coming of the Messiah through preaching repentance, confession, and baptism, asking his listeners to change their lives **before** God's return. He reminded people that God could not be tacked on to their lives without significant change, a separation from a former way of living. It's easy to expect God to work in certain ways, places or situations. But, when we turn away, separate ourselves, from our old ways, we open ourselves for the reception of **God's work** in and through us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We imagine that John is puzzled by the fact that he is to baptize the very one that he says he is not worthy of tying his shoes. John's baptism of repentance presumes the presence of sin. But the scriptures are clear, Jesus had no sin. Yet, he identifies with sinners. As he comes to the riverside he has no ego concerns. With remarkable humility he is not ashamed to be found in the company of sinners like us, and even to be seen as one of us. Jesus ate with sinners to the scandal of many of the religious leaders. Jesus was known as a friend of sinners, had pity on the woman caught in adultery, allowed a sinful woman to touch him and anoint his feet. He cast out demons. He suffered and died for sinners in the way reserved for the worst criminals...crucified. Jesus was not ashamed to share a human life with us. He freely entered the waters and, to any outsider who didn't know him, he would simply be numbered among the other sinners, which he was not.

In the waters of the Jordan Jesus was baptized and the heavens were opened, and they were not only opened for Jesus, **but for us, too**. I love how Eugene Peterson's translation talks about our connectedness to God through Christ. He writes: Christ came and preached peace to outsiders and insiders. He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the God. We're no longer wandering exiles. No longer strangers or outsiders. We *belong* to God and God is building a home in us. God used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using us, fitting us in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home. Think about that...God, at home, in us.

Through Jesus we are all made brothers and sisters in Christ and at our own baptisms, God names and claims us as beloved children. And as God's adopted sons and daughters, the Holy Spirit lives in each of us and with **each of us, God is pleased!** These can just be pretty words, comforting thoughts, **OR** they can be the gospel message that transforms our lives. Find a comfortable position.

Breathe slowly, in through your nostrils, out through your mouth. Breathe... Feel your tummy slowly rising and falling. Imagine yourself sitting along the banks of the Jordan River.

Hear the ripple of the water. Birds in the bushes. Feel the breeze in your hair. The sun's warmth on your face. Smell the earth beneath you and the plants around you.

Look down in the valley. Up to the mountains. Feel their vastness, and yet their smallness in all the universe.

See all the people that have gathered around you. You have come to see John. So have they. Some come to be baptized. Others, just curious.

Off to the right you see a man, walking down the hill, coming toward the river. Something in you senses he is different from you, from other. You know that he is Jesus. And soon it becomes apparent that he is here to be baptized by John.

Jesus winds his way through the crowd. You see the puzzled look at John's face. He knows that he's not worthy of baptizing Jesus. Jesus should be baptizing him. But...John baptizes Jesus.

Coming up out of the water, the heavens are opening and light, like a dove rests above Jesus' head. It can be none other than the Spirit of God coming upon Jesus, God's only, beloved Son.

Can you hear that? See it? Can you feel the flutter of the dove's wings as you feel the air moving with each flap? And just when you are about to catch your breath again, there's a voice from heaven, **"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."**

Keep seeing the sights. Hearing the smells. Touching the earth beneath you.

See Jesus and the Spirit on him. Feel the emotions washing over you. In this moment, let go and let yourself go wherever God takes you next.

Say good-bye for now. Ask Jesus, your brother, your friend, to lead you back into your life.

Say "thank you" for the journey that has been and will continue to be with the power and presence of the Spirit living in you."

Be still and remember. God says to you...I am pleased with you.

The question now: How will this transform my everyday living and yours?