

Mark 1:9-15

First Sunday in Lent

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 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. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

As Mark the evangelist is prone to do, he packs in a lot of action in just a few short sentences. Jesus comes to be baptized, hears the voice of God, goes into the wilderness and then emerges ready to begin his mission. We don't have any conversations between John and Jesus, we don't hear of Jesus talking with future disciples anyone else either. We don't hear about how Jesus was tempted. We don't know why John was arrested, we don't hear who arrested him, or how his case was disposed. Mark is like a man rushing to get his story out, but talking so fast he seems to forget many of the helpful detail. He is a "just the facts" kind of guy.

Of course, as we know from the other gospels, there is a lot more to the story than what Mark shares here, but at the same time, there isn't anything essential that's been left out either. According to Mark, John appeared in the desert calling out the Israelites for the ways they had strayed from the will of God for them, but also offering them a kind of reset, a do-over of sorts.

Prophets have a habit of making the powerful uncomfortable by challenging the status quo that has out them on top, which is why John is arrested and will eventually be executed. But the politics of first century Judea aren't really the point of Mark's story; rather it is the timing and impact of Jesus's actions.

John stirred up the soil, but it is Jesus who comes to plant the seeds of salvation, and through his own blood, to fertilize them. Jesus now emerges from obscurity to take up the work he was born to do. Now that work isn't merely the Passion, but his ministry of healing and reconciliation, of which his death is only a part.

Jesus emerges, in the right moment, to offer a model, a blueprint of what the Israelites who have hit the do-over button John offered, are to do with the second chance they have been given. Their baptism, like our own, was not a one-time event. It was not the

culmination of their relationship with God, but the beginning point of a new way of life and a new kind of relationship with God.

The best life possible for us, the life that brings the greatest contentment, the life that is the most fulfilling, the life that at the end offers no regrets, is the life lived following the footsteps of Jesus, immersed in the glory of God's love.