

Covenant Identity: You are My Beloved

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Preacher: Rev. Andrew Ong

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The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet, I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way, a voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him, confessing their sins.

They were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

[1 : 2 8] And this was his message. After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. At that time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, You are my Son, whom I love, and you and I will be pleased.

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with wild animals, and angels attended him.

After John was put in prison, Jesus went to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. The time has come, he said. The kingdom of God will come near.

[2 : 3 0] Repent and believe the good news. As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

Come follow me, Jesus said, and I will send you out to fish for people. At once they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little further, he saw James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets.

Without delay, he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place where he prayed.

This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ. Thank you, Gail, for that reading.

Good morning, everyone. My name is Andrew. I'm one of the pastors here. Merry Christmas. I want to give a shout-out to the Thomases. I believe this is Samuel Thomas' first Sunday at Christ Church.

[3 : 39] So welcome, little one. What's that, seven weeks? Eight? Eight weeks. That's pretty good. That's pretty good. And I also want to give a shout-out to Amy, no longer Amy Howe, but Amy Ng and Jesse Ng, who got married this past Friday.

They're not here right now. They're enjoying their time away. But yeah, a lot of exciting things going on in our church. We, between Christmas and Easter, open up one of the four Gospels, and today we are in the Gospel of Mark, so we'll open that up together.

But before we do that, will you pray with me? Father, we ask that you would speak to us, that your Spirit would be so present and so palpable amongst us, that we would hear from you and that we'd be changed, that your word would go forth as the authoritative, powerful, compelling, gentle word that it is, and that we would behold your Son, who is not just our King, but our servant King, who doesn't just wear a crown, but a crown of thorns for us.

And would that change the way we live as children of God? And if there are those here today who are not children of God, we ask that you would make your Son so compelling to them and the way of life that he's presented to us as this servant King.

And we pray that because of our existence here as a church, that people would be led into deeper relationships with Christ, who we believe is the glorious one.

[5 : 20] In his name we pray. Amen. So like I said, every year we get into the Gospels between Christmas and Easter, and this year we are in what pretty much everyone in the early church believed was the Gospel according to Mark.

Mark was someone who they believed to actually sit at the feet of Peter to hear his firsthand eyewitness account and record it. We believe that this is probably the shortest and the earliest account.

So if you ever wondered what Peter thought about Jesus, this is probably it, here in the Gospel of Mark. Now the thing about the Gospels is that they all tell the same story about the same person, but each of them has a distinct focus.

So for example, in Matthew you have a lot of Jewish references, you have a lot of prophecies fulfilled, you have a genealogy that goes to Abraham because Matthew's trying to show that Jesus is the promised Messiah to Israel.

And then in Luke you have a genealogy that goes all the way back to Adam, and you have a very human Jesus. You have a Jesus who's very dependent on the Holy Spirit, and this is because Luke is trying to portray Jesus as a human, truly the Son of Man.

[6 : 29] Then in the Gospel of John, what do you have? Do you have a genealogy at all? No, you don't. You don't. You have, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word created everything, and in Him was life and light for the world.

John is trying to show that Jesus is God. He's divine. But now Mark, what's Mark about? Mark again, it's the shortest Gospel, probably the earliest one. And what I love about Mark, and why it's probably shorter than many of the others, is that this is kind of like raw and unfiltered, less interpreted Jesus.

Less the teacher, more the doer. Shorter dialogues, more action, you know, going from this to that to that scene. No sermon on the mount, no great high priestly prayer, less theological explanation and interpretation of His teaching and ministry.

And just look at, like, all the ground we covered right here in the first 20 verses of Mark chapter 1, right? It's boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, just keeps moving along. And so Mark, it points us not so much to the messianic, divine, or human identities of Jesus, but to the way He lived.

The way He lived, particularly as a servant. The way He lived as a servant. Now this idea of Jesus as the way, you know, I grew up in the church, I grew up, there was never a time in my life where I didn't know about Jesus, because my parents taught me about this Messiah God who's the way, the truth, and the life.

[7 : 52] I probably memorized that, John 14, as a kid in elementary school. The way, the truth, and the life. And it always made sense to me how He's the truth, right? Like, Jesus teaches the truth, He's God, He teaches the truth about who God is, and how to live the right way, and He's the life, of course.

He's the author of life, and He came to give, you know, resurrection, eternal life. But I always thought of the way, Him as the way, as He's kind of like the way to the truth, the way to the life.

And I never really gave much thought to what it meant that He was the way, which is actually what the early church called Christians before they called Christians, Christians, right? But only these last couple years have I come to realize that He's not just the way to the truth, He's not just the way to the life, but He is a distinct way of truth.

He is a distinct way of life. Like, He's not just a door that you walk through to get to truth, He's not just a door you walk through to get to life, but He's a pattern. He's a pattern.

Not just some example of how to be good and moral, but He's the very pattern of how life was meant to be for the children of God. And I wonder how many of us also need to come to that realization today that Jesus isn't just a truth to be accepted in our heads or an eternal life to hope in with our hearts, but a way of life to be lived out and worked out with our hands.

[9 : 12] This reminds me of a conversation I had a couple months ago. It was during our Explore God series. We had a Q&A; afterwards and I was chatting with someone who's been here in our church for a few years now exploring Jesus, trying to understand and decide whether or not he wants to trust in Jesus and go all the way and become a member of the church.

And he said, you know, I really am drawn to Jesus and His teachings. I admire Him and His values and the way He lived and I don't have a plausible alternative account for the empty tomb and how such an international movement could have come about from this mere first century Jewish teacher under Roman occupation.

But what do I do if I still feel like I still can't believe? And so what I said to Him was, you know, it sounds pretty much like your head is there and it even sounds like your heart is there.

It seems like you want to believe but I also get it that you're not there yet. I totally get that. But what if we tried to not just engage your head, not just even your heart but also your hands?

And I encouraged Him not just to wrestle with Jesus and His claims intellectually or just to admire Him in His heart but to try, actually try Jesus' way of life on.

[10 : 26] Like try living Jesus' way, doing what He did, spending time seeking nearness with the Father, spending time in the Scriptures meditating upon the Word of God, spending time in prayer and in solitude, spending time serving others and sticking close to a family of believers, a family of fellow followers of Jesus.

You know, see for many of us like Western, rationalistic, enlightened people, we have a tendency to think that we need to know that Christianity is true in our heads with certainty before we let it come into our embodied way of life or for maybe we're more post-enlightened, we're more romantic Westerners, we think we need to feel it's true in our hearts before we let it affect how we live.

But what if head, heart, and hands are more integrally related than we think? And what if we believe and devote our lives to, what if what we believe and devote our lives to isn't simply about cognition or about feeling, but actually it's informed by the way we live our lives?

What if our habits and our patterns of life are not as neutral as we think? There's a reason why we do the same thing here every Sunday. We have a pattern, we have a liturgy, a habit, a way of worshiping to form who we are before God.

Our pattern of life is just as important as our thoughts and emotions maybe even more. And I think we all intuitively know this.

[11 : 54] We're all looking for a way of life just as much as we're looking for a truth to believe in with our heads and an abundant life to hope for with our hearts. Think about your Instagram feed, those of you who use Instagram. You don't just follow mind and heart influencers, you follow lifestyle influencers, right?

How to be a better mom, a better entrepreneur, CEO, investor, athlete. We're all looking for ways to live in this world as our ideal selves. That's why P90X was such a hit, right?

P90X. Anyone remember P90X? All right, thank you, Lori. If I exercise in this program for 90 days, I'll get ripped, all right? That's what P90X is.

90 days, or if I follow Sean T, right? 25 minutes a day, I'll burn all my body fat, right? Or maybe for the ladies in this room, the bar method, all right? It's literally called a method.

It's a way. It's a way. We're all looking for a way, a way to live our best lives. So here in Mark's gospel, we are presented not just with a Jesus to believe in with our heads, or even a Jesus to love with our hearts, but a Jesus to follow with our hands.

[13 : 01] And not just as some glorious God-man king, but as a suffering servant. A suffering servant. That's why we're calling the series in Mark's gospel, Deny Yourself and Follow Me.

Deny Yourself and Follow Me. We're going after discipleship this year, 2024. Deny Yourself and Follow Me is what Jesus says. It's our New Year's challenge as a church.

Will we follow the way of Jesus even and especially when it requires that we deny ourselves? Now I know that can sound pretty dogmatic, maybe fanatical, fundamentalist, just super religious, right?

Deny Yourself. Follow Jesus. Like of course, of course a preacher is going to be up here saying that, right? Deny Myself. Follow whatever this preacher claims to be divine.

It's the oldest trick in the book. But this is why it's so important. This is why it's so important to remember Mark's emphasis on Jesus the servant.

[14 : 01] Jesus the servant. You see, because this idea of denying ourselves and following Jesus, this isn't some kind of religious power play. See, with a lot of other religions, deny yourself and follow me is kind of like a two-step process of lowering yourself in order to honor and venerate like whatever your divine deity is, whatever is supreme or superior.

But you see, with Jesus, even though he is the ultimately superior one, he is God himself, when he says deny yourself and follow me, he's saying the same thing with both those statements.

The two commands are intimately connected in an extremely unique way. Like, he's not saying simply deny yourself so you can follow me as your supreme God. But he's saying to follow me is to deny yourself just as I denied myself and took up a cross for you.

See, this is the utter uniqueness of Jesus. He's both God and a servant, both crowned and crucified. no other God is like Jesus. Every other God who exists to serve is nothing more than a genie, really.

If your God exists to serve you, that's just a genie. You're the God in that story. And every other God who supposedly reigns as most high and supreme just over all the universe, every one of those kinds of God has only ever existed to be served and not to serve.

[15 : 29] But Jesus is different. He's a servant king. That was his way, the way he chose to be God with us and the way he chose to be a human amongst us.

And Mark shows this to us in a wonderfully unique way right from the start. Now let's look at our text today, Mark chapter one. Now before Mark demonstrates Jesus' servanthood, he makes very clear from the beginning that Jesus is the supreme.

He's the anointed Messiah king of Israel. Now he's even God. Mark chapter one, verse one, the beginning of the good news about Jesus, the Messiah, the son of God. And again, not just some generic God and king but the God and king that the Hebrew prophets of Yahweh had foretold.

Verse two, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet, I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way. The way for who? If you look that verse up in the prophets, it's the way for Yahweh.

Verse three, a voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord. The Lord is the one he's preparing a way for. Mark is saying the prophets foretold that a messenger, a final prophet would come to prepare the way for not just the coming of Messiah king but the coming of God himself.

[16 : 45] The coming of God himself. He's saying this coming one is God himself. And the prophet here, boom, is in verse four, John the Baptist. John the Baptist who came to prepare the way for Jesus.

Look at verse four with me. And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And there are a couple details here that I want you to notice.

First, where is this happening? In the wilderness. Now in the history of Israel, what has often happened in the wilderness? What was the wilderness? The wilderness was kind of like an anti-Eden, the place where thorns and thistles grow.

It's a place of water scarcity and little vegetation. Hard to live there. It's also a place though where what? People encountered God. Where people were transformed by God.

It was part of Abram's pilgrim journey. It's the site of Moses and the burning bush. It's where Israel was led by God in their wandering for 40 years. The wilderness is where people had to depend on God for their daily bread and even water from rocks.

[17 : 51] The place where it was unmistakable that their lives absolutely depended on Yahweh. Now also look with me at who is coming to John in the wilderness.

Verse 5. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him confessing their sins. They were baptized by him in the Jordan River. Alright, so here's the picture.

Remember, Judea and Jerusalem, they were in the south. These were the most faithfully religious Jewish people and yet they're still occupied. They're occupied by the Romans.

Jerusalem is far from its former glory under a son of David. And so what's their strategy at this point to restore the kingdom of Israel? Their strategy is to follow the Pharisees' moralistic, legalistic, self-salvation project to obey enough for God to finally listen to them and give them their kingdom back.

And they're all trying to do this. They're wearing their make Israel great again hats longing for the old kingdom of David and Solomon. The old kingdom. But what John is saying, what John is saying is that you were never the great kingdom that you thought you were.

[19 : 00] This entire nation needs to be born again. This entire nation needs to be cleansed. Come back out into the wilderness. Go back through the baptism of the Jordan River again to prepare yourself for the new and better kingdom to come.

And John is preaching a baptism therefore of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. And notice it's not, it's a baptism, okay? It's a baptism. It's not a self-bathing to cleanse themselves.

He's preaching a baptism. Like think about that word. We don't baptize ourselves, right? We get baptized. Baptized, baptism is a passive activity.

You know, if you studied the Old Testament law, you'd know that up to this point, virtually every Jewish cleansing ritual for the forgiveness of sins was a self-cleansing ritual.

You were to go and bathe yourself. But here, John was saying, no, you can't. You can't cleanse yourself. You're that filthy. That's why I'm baptizing you as a sign that you actually need a divine baptism, verse eight, a baptism in the Holy Spirit from God Himself to really get clean, to really get right before God.

[20 : 11] John is saying, you need God to come to you, to clean you, to forgive you, and what you need to do in the meantime is to turn to Him, to repent, to turn your whole self, your whole life toward Him and His way.

So from verses one to eight, Mark is making very clear that Jesus is God and King. He's the Messiah. He's the coming Lord that the prophets had foretold. He is the God who needs to come and cleanse Israel once and for all with His Holy Spirit.

And even as great of a prophet as John the Baptist is, he says in verse seven that he is unworthy to even stoop down and untie this coming Lord's sandals. The most menial, most dishonorable task, John the Baptist is pleading with the people to prepare for God Himself, to make straight His paths.

And by the way, this idea of making straight paths, right, where are they? They're in the ancient Roman Empire, right? Known for its Roman roads, right? But for the most part, the roads were unpaved, often not very well maintained, and definitely not straight.

In fact, in many ancient Near Eastern records, you have kings complaining about just the roundabout routes that they had to take to get to places. And even some of them feeling so self-important that they demanded that their slaves and that their subjects who served them make straight paths for them.

[21 : 36] Make it easy for me to get to where I need to go. So John is saying, hey, there's an even greater king coming, more worthy than any other of a straight and direct path, because he is none other than Yahweh Himself.

That's who he's saying that Jesus is. This is John's message. God is coming. God is coming, and Mark doesn't want us to miss that. But now he's kind of identified Jesus as God, but then what happens when God does come into the picture in verse 9, in the person of Jesus.

Verse 9. At that time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. So try to picture this. John is baptizing hundreds, maybe thousands of Jewish people.

Many probably are named Jesus. Yeshua is probably a very common name, right? And then his cousin comes, and in the eyes of many onlookers, he's just another guy named Jesus in this long line, hoping to get baptized in the Jordan River.

And what's worse is he's from this hopeless little town called Nazareth, all right? So he comes to be baptized, but then what happens after this Jesus' baptism?

[22 : 50] Something utterly unique happens, right? Of all the Yeshua's that John baptizes after this specific one, verse 10, heaven tears open.

The Spirit descends upon him like a dove. A voice from heaven says, You are my Son, whom I love. With you I am well.

Please, what's going on here? Well, this is no ordinary baptism. This is no ordinary Yeshua. Whereas every other baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, a reminder of God's divine displeasure toward each individual's sin, this baptism of the sinless Son of God was the first baptism of the Holy Spirit.

It was a divine affirmation of the Father's unbridled pleasure toward His beloved Son. The heavens literally tore open as if the love of the Father could not be contained.

Burst out of heaven onto earth, the Holy Spirit descending upon the Son. But then look at verse 11. Look at what the Father says to the Son again.

[24 : 03] You are my Son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased. Now if you are familiar with the Old Testament, actually take out your blue Bibles in your pews right now. If you're familiar with the Old Testament, turn to Psalm chapter 2.

You'd know that this word spoken from the heavens was actually a combination of two prophetic words spoken by the psalmist and then spoken by Isaiah. Look at Psalm chapter 2.

It's on page 431 in your pew Bibles. Psalm chapter 2, verse 7. The Lord's decree says, You are my Son. Today I have become your Father.

Ask me and I will make the nations your inheritance. If you heard these words spoken from the heavens, you would know that this comes from Psalm chapter 2. You are my Son, God is saying.

Ask me anything and it's yours. That's what he's saying to Jesus in this moment. But also turn to now page 588, Isaiah chapter 42.

[25 : 05] Isaiah chapter 42, verse 1, page 588. And here you have the prophet saying, Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.

I will put my spirit on him. Now do you hear that? This combination of prophecies here spoken from the heavens upon Jesus, what does it mean? His identity is that of a beloved son and a spirit empowered servant.

He's not just a son but he's also at the same time a servant. But a special servant. He's not some slave but he's a chosen servant in whom God delights and puts his spirit. And see again, this is a super defining moment in the life and ministry of Jesus.

He is given an utterly unique identity and role. This is, though he is in very nature God, though this is the coming of Yahweh, the answer to Israel's prayers that God would tear the heavens and come down to save them, he is at the same time a son beloved by his father and a servant empowered by his spirit.

And this is just as profound as the reality that he is both God and servant. servant. You know why? Because it portrays for us what a perfect life in relationship with God looks like.

[26 : 26] Yes, a life of submission as servants but always at the same time as sons and as daughters, as children of the king.

It's not like we have to be faithful servants first to earn our place in his house and in his family. No, we serve as sons and as sons we serve. This is the way of Jesus.

Jesus served as a beloved son. No inferiority, no shame, all joy, all pleasure, all delight, simply living into his identity as a son and as a servant.

And at the same time, Jesus was a son with a mission, right? He was a son with a mission and a purpose, a distinct servant calling something to accomplish, something to do, not some spoiled, you know, silver spoon brat solely existing to consume his father's inheritance.

He was constantly serving people. Even having been proclaimed as God's beloved son with whom God was already well pleased, he still lived to serve.

[27 : 27] You know, I was finishing my McShane Bible reading plan this year in the Gospel of John and I was struck. I was struck by how at the end of his life, Jesus is dead. And even when his disciples saw their supposed Messiah crucified, like I would have been pretty upset.

and I wouldn't have really cared about his body or about his burial or visiting his tomb. Like the dude said he was Messiah and now he's dead. So he's no use to me anymore.

He actually lied. He lied to us. Forget that, right? But what did so many of his followers do when it didn't make any sense to them, when they had no reason to believe that he was the Messiah anymore?

They risked their lives to take care of his body. They offered up their own personal tombs. They spent the time to wrap his body and apply the spices and the oils. Why would they do that?

Because even though they didn't expect the resurrection and even though they had little to no reason to still believe he was the Messiah, they could not get away from the reality that there was something special.

[28 : 33] There was something absolutely lovely and wonderful about this man. Something absolutely compassionate about his character, right? This sacrificial servant that he was, always putting others before himself, healing and liberating left and right no matter how deserving or undeserving people were, exposing himself to Gentiles and unclean lepers and even to death itself.

This is the kind of child of God he was. He was a servant and a son. And when this clicks for us, this servant-son dynamic, it changes everything.

It changes everything about how we live. Look what happens to Jesus as soon as he's declared as beloved son and spirit-filled servant. Verse 12. At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness and he was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan.

He was with the wild animals and angels attended him. He's going out, he's being baptized, this is a defining moment of his life. His Father says, I love you. He gives him the most powerful thing in the world, the Holy Spirit and then he's sent out into the wilderness.

What's up with that? How could a loving father let his beloved son and how could a Holy Spirit lead his empowered servant to be subjected to Satan and the wild animals in the wilderness?

[29 : 54] Well, it's precisely as a beloved son and spirit-filled servant, no one else could endure the wilderness but a spirit-filled servant and a beloved son of God.

In fact, it's only a beloved son and spirit-filled servant who could survive such a wilderness experience. Only someone so assured of the love and provision of his Father. Only someone so in tune with God's Spirit who could endure those forty days, depend on nothing but God and his angels and overcome temptation and show us our fullest potential as humans depending on God in our wilderness circumstances.

Jesus did not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeded from the mouth of God and those words were, you are my son whom I love. With you I am well pleased and he lived by those words.

He lived by those words. Those were the words that sustained him and gave him what he needed through all the most intense moments of his life. And my question for us going into 2024 Christ Church is has this word become our daily bread as well?

That we are beloved sons and daughters that we are spirit-filled servants of the King. Does that give us everything we need to live for tomorrow? You know, whenever I read about these words spoken to Jesus at his baptism about his beloved sonship, I can't help but think of a story Walter Isaacson shares in his biography of Steve Jobs.

[31 : 33] In case you didn't know, Steve Jobs was adopted and from an early age his parents would often be very intentional about explaining to him that he was adopted and that that was part of his story.

But one day he was like six or seven and he was sitting on his lawn and he was explaining to the girl next door that he was adopted and you know, she was younger, she was just kind of curious and she said, oh, so does that mean that your parents your real parents didn't want you?

And Jobs said that these words struck him like a lightning bolt and he ran into the house weeping and weeping, crying, and his loving parents tried to console him saying, no, no, but we, you have to understand we specifically chose you, we love you.

But these genuinely loving parents, these words from his genuinely loving parents, they never seem to be enough. And though Jobs would deny it, his closest friends and colleagues according to Isaacson believe that this open wound never really healed and afflicted him like all his life, contributing to his maniacal personality, his reflexive cruelty, his fierce independence, his lust for control, and even the abandonment of his own child because he just couldn't be bothered or distracted from his apple empire which was pretty much an extension of himself, right?

And I wonder how many of us can relate to Steve Jobs, maybe feeling like servants but not sons. Always like we have to try to prove ourselves, earn our identity, earn our place in this or that family or community.

[33 : 07] And maybe we find our servant selves trying to treat others as servants and slaves just like Steve Jobs treated his employees. Less so out of a desire to lead them and honor God and honor our neighbors and be a blessing to the world and more so just out of our insecurity.

But what if we believed that we could be both servants and sons of the loving God by uniting ourselves to our big brother Jesus?

How might that change us? How might that change the world we live in if we believed that we were God's beloved children and filled with his delight, the very spirit of his power and his presence?

What kinds of wildernesses might we enter for the kingdom of God? What kinds of wild animals might we be willing to face? You know, if Mark was really writing this, sitting at the feet of Peter's teaching, this was during a very intense time of Christian persecution in Rome with Christians being literally thrown to the wild animals.

Mark is reminding his fellow brothers and sisters that Jesus gets it just as they are being thrown to the animals in the Colosseum for sport. Jesus, he was also with the wild animals and alone.

[34 : 20] Following Jesus is hard and it's dangerous and it's costly. But if we are beloved children and empowered servants of God in Christ, we have what we need to face what we face.

And not just to face hardship, but to thrive in hardship and to bear witness to a better way of life. Like, what kind of workplaces, what kind of world would we live in if people walked in the way of Jesus as sons and servants of an all-loving and all-powerful God?

If we laid down our rights and submitted to God, put others first, led as servants rather than lords? And all the while with confidence that we had a Heavenly Father who loved us, an unshakable inheritance waiting for us and the Holy Spirit's power to do everything that God had ordained for us to do.

That's what it's like to walk in the way of Jesus. It's to live with the incredible confidence of being loved by God as His own child and empowered by His Spirit to do everything that God wants us to do.

It's taking the initiative to exercise His authority in the world, in our workplaces, in our relationships, in our families and neighborhoods, inviting people to follow us in Jesus' life-giving ways.

[35 : 37] You know, after His wilderness experience, having experienced God see Him through, Jesus then takes, He picks up the mantle from John the Baptist, right? It says, Jesus starts preaching in verse 15, the time has come, the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the good news.

And not only does He preach, but He takes initiative in His relationships. You know, in the Jewish tradition, how it typically worked was students would go and they would pick the rabbi that they wanted to sit under and learn from.

The disciples would pursue that rabbi, ask, can I join your school? And then once admitted, they would serve that rabbi hand and foot so that He could devote His whole life to teaching them and they could receive His instruction and they could try to live the way He did to the best of their abilities.

But this is different, right? Here, we see Jesus taking the initiative, Jesus pursuing, Jesus inviting these disciples to come and follow Him. And I think what Jesus is doing is He's modeling His alternative way of relating to people.

Not pursuing people to colonize them and to oppress them and to proselytize them, but pursuing people with love. Pursuing people as a servant. Just as the Father tore the heavens open to speak a word of affirmation and welcome to Jesus, so is Jesus speaking forth His own words of loving invitation to these disciples, to invite them, to adopt them into His own family.

[37 : 00] He's generously drawing them into something far more wonderful than they can imagine. And sure, they'll probably treat Him much like a rabbi and serve Him so that they can focus on His teachings, but they're about to get something far greater than what they give to their rabbi.

Now, you might have found this kind of strange that these fishermen at the end of this account in verses like 18 to 20, they left so much, right? Just because Jesus called them. They left their nets, they left their boats, their businesses, their hired men.

James and John were probably pretty successful in their fishing business. They left their father. And Mark really doesn't give any reason at all. It's just like there's this inherent power and authority to Jesus' words, come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people.

Because honestly, they clearly had no idea what they were getting themselves into by following Jesus and leaving their nets behind, right? But what we do know is that at the end of their lives, all four of them, Simon, Andrew, James, and John, they were totally glad that they did.

And they counted it the greatest honor of their lives to walk in the way of Jesus. And they even died following Jesus and walking in his way as servants and sons of God.

[38 : 20] Because you know what they discovered in Jesus? This coming God and king for whom they were supposed to make straight paths for his arrival? they found a king who charted his own path, who charted his own way.

Without conscripting, you know, forced laborers or slaves to make his arrival smooth and easy, Jesus took a different way. Born as a helpless baby, lying in a manger to a poor family from Nazareth, and the only straight road that he walked was from the cradle to the cross.

The mighty Messiah, the sovereign son, did not turn to the left or to the right, but willingly went directly to the cross as our crucified king and suffering servant, sure of who he was and what he was called to do, what he was meant to do.

And the world we live in has simultaneously looked upon this way of Jesus both with tender admiration and defiant disgust. Having never seen such a beautiful sacrifice, and yet, in our own sinful, self-interested natures, choosing more often than not, again and again, not to serve, but to be served.

But that's not the way of Jesus. Christchurch, Jesus invites us. He invites us to deny ourselves and to follow him, to take up our crosses into the wilderness amongst the wild animals and to fellowship with him as the servant, son, and savior he chose to be out of his own self denying love for us.

[39 : 57] He invites us to enter into his belovedness as servants and sons ourselves for the good of our world and for the glory of God. Will you pray with me?

Lord, we ask that you would give us what we need to walk in your way, to walk in the way of the servant, son, Jesus, to be his disciples and to make disciples of this servant king, savior of the world.

Would we do so to the glory of your name and for the good of our neighbors? Would you heighten our imagination, our vision of what this could look like here in the Bay Area, living the way Jesus lived and bearing fruit because of what you're doing in us?

Would you do that here in our church, not because we deserve it, but because you deserve it, Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen.