

Untitled (38)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 December 2020

Preacher: David Bena

[0:00] You know, I think I got it for the first time in my life. If you feel called to share a witness with the congregation, just let me know and we'll set that up.

Bev, that was wonderful. Thank you for sharing with us. Let us pray. Speak to us and through us your mighty word, O Lord, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So, I guess I'll preach from here today. Do you remember Prince Philip, husband of Queen Elizabeth, sometimes outspoken?

In the middle of a worship service at the cathedral one day, he jumped up and said to his wife, This is not a sermon. It's a bloody general anesthetic.

And the dean was gone. He did not preach there again. Well, I don't want to deliver a bloody general anesthetic today.

[1:04] I would like to engage you and not put you to sleep. Time will tell whether that's actually what's going to happen. Our sermon title today, two questions.

Living in the Spirit? Or sleeping through it? Sometimes both reign. We're looking at today's gospel lesson, which is from Mark chapter 1.

Anybody tell me what page that's on? I don't have a Bible right here in front of me. Maybe not.

Maybe not. 9-9. 9-93. Is that what? 9-4. 9-94. Gospel of Mark, chapter 1, verses 1-8.

As always, when we read a passage, we look at the two cons. These are not negative cons. These are positive cons. The context and the content.

The context comes right in that first verse. Mark, who was actually a servant or a friend or a follower of Simon Peter, and wrote his gospel mainly dictated by Simon Peter, starts out with the words, In the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[2:29] Beginning. Now this is noteworthy. Is there another book in the Bible that starts with the beginning? Genesis.

Right at the beginning. Beginning. Okay. It says, in the beginning. This is the beginning of the story of creation. It's the beginning of the story of humankind.

And it's the story of the downfall of humankind. We think of the Garden of Eden. So that Genesis takes us through creation and into the problem.

Mark, which we believe is the first gospel written. Mark starts with the beginning of the solution. In the beginning.

In the beginning. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, we're going to find, is the solution to the problem posed by Genesis.

[3:30] So this is the context in which the gospel of Mark comes into our lives. And it comes into our lives through one man.

John the Baptist. John the Baptist. Who probably hated being called John the Baptist. No, there were no Presbyterians yet.

He couldn't be, you know, John the Anglican. He was known by what he did. He baptized. Okay, so in this particular passage, we get the beginning of the solution.

Which allows us to move into the content. And so I've already started in the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Okay, so Mark is addressing two audiences. He's addressing the Jewish population. And he's addressing the Gentile population.

[4:35] Back in those days, you were either a Jew or you were a Gentile. You were a Gentile if you were not a Jew. Totally different mindsets.

And Mark captures this right at the beginning. Because he says, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ, Messiah, the Jewish hope for salvation.

So he's saying, first of all, Jesus is the Messiah, Jewish audience. He's the solution for you. And then he says, the Son of God. Son of God would hit Greek culture.

They love to talk about gods and their God's spouses and God's children. And so he says, Jesus is the Son of the God.

So he's hitting that. And then Mark draws from the Old Testament itself, the Jewish scriptures, when he reads from Isaiah. We heard the passage from Isaiah read this morning.

[5:43] Prepare the way. One is coming to prepare the way for the Messiah. They knew that back in the Old Testament days. And those who were paying attention were waiting.

Mark says, here he comes. Get ready. He's coming.

And so John appears as an Elijah figure. It says, verse 4. John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

That's loaded. First of all, he's in the wilderness. God first spoke to Abraham in the wilderness.

He spoke to Moses in the wilderness. He speaks to us in the wilderness of our souls. And so in the wilderness, John the Baptist comes. And not only that, but he's asking people to do something.

[6:48] He's saying, get in the water. The water is running. Confess your sins. Those sins are going downstream. And where are they going to end up?

The Dead Sea. Your sins are going to be dead. Get in the water. Confess your sins. Get ready. It's what you've got to do to get ready for the Messiah.

And then it says, and all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Now, this doesn't mean 100% of all Jerusalemites went down. Now, when I say the whole world came to church, I don't mean 6.5 billion people showed up.

So what he's saying is this was a popular setting. This guy out in the wilderness was drawing people to him. And they were following his instructions.

[7:52] They were confessing their sins. They were getting in the water. They were dumping water on themselves. Dunking into the water. They were following the instruction of John the Baptist.

If only it had continued so well. And then we find out a little more about John. Verse 6. John was clothed with camel's hair. He wore a leather belt around his waist.

And he ate locusts and wild honey. You know what that says to me? Rough cut guy. John probably looked like a freak.

He was very possibly a part of the Essene monk community down in the Dead Sea. He had taken a vow. Probably a Nazaree vow.

A Nazaree vow is you did not shave your head. Hair everywhere. Beard. You'd say, get thee to the barber shop.

[8:53] This was the rough cut guy who was delivering a rough cut message. He even ate grasshoppers and wild honey. Now, I had to actually eat grasshoppers in a jungle survival course.

They're not that bad when you boil them and put a little salt on them. I never thought of trying them with wild honey. But that would maybe taste a little better.

John lived on that. He wasn't in a survival course. That's what he lived on. Rough cut. Here's the message. Take it or leave it. Kind of a guy.

And he preached. He said in verse 7. After me comes he who is mightier than I. The strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

He was saying, I'm not even qualified to be a servant of this Messiah. Think about how great he is. He's the Messiah.

[9:55] The Son of God. And then John delivers the punchline. I have baptized you with water. He says to the crowds in the river. But he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

The Messiah is coming. And with that. How's the anesthesia? Are you there? Okay there.

Alright. So we can move to point two then. Point two is the theology. What's the spiritual truth given us in this passage? Well. There are two words or phrases we need to focus in on.

One is a Greek word called metanoia. Comes from a Hebrew word which means turn around. It means take a 180 degree turn.

And in the early church, when the people were baptized, they faced the west. They were baptized and they turned to face the east, the sun, the Christ.

[11:00] They did a metanoia. John the Baptist preached a metanoia for the forgiveness of sins, a repentance.

The nation of Judea, by the way, needed that message. They were mired in religious and political corruption.

The religious leaders had sold out to the Roman government. There was no real sense of accountability. The higher up you got, the more privilege you had.

But you lived, quote, the life. The nation of Judea needed repentance. How about us?

Is there a need for metanoia? Last year, Franklin Graham came through Syracuse.

[12:00] Some of you went to it. His deal is the nation needs to repent. Well, that stadium out on the lake was loaded with people.

I mean, people came out. He was like John the Baptist calling people to repent. He's calling for purity in government. And guess what? He is not loved by the media.

Have you noticed? And even we, in a sense, want to condemn him. He must be a hypocrite. He's got to be raking in money.

He's taking money. The problem is we can't get through the man to the message. Franklin Graham, I know him. He's a little bit rough cut, I'll tell you.

He likes to spend his time up in Alaska in a little bush village flying his airplane around. That's what he would do if he had the choice. He's rough cut, but he's delivering a message.

[13:03] We, in our nation today, need to turn around. To turn 180 degrees. Where is integrity?

Where is honesty? Where is it in the church? Where is it in the government, in business? We need metanoia. But not only the nation needs metanoia, we need metanoia.

Now, in the liturgy, we say we have done those things which we ought not to have done. And we have not done those things we ought to have done.

Sins of commission and sins of omission. It's not by mistake that that prayer is put in the liturgy every week. We need continually to repent.

In the steps to salvation, one step is repentance. Now, we don't get saved because we repent. But repentance is one way that we move toward salvation through the power of the Holy Spirit.

[14:11] And it's a lifetime process. Metanoia. So that's the first word that comes out of this gospel lesson.

The second is a phrase. John says, Jesus will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. What in the world did John mean by that?

And what does it mean today? Baptism. Well, we know the word baptizo, which is another Greek word, which means to immerse or dip. We use it.

In fact, we have a baptismal font in the back of the church we use every so often. To be baptized is to be cleansed from sin. It's a symbolic act.

It's still a sacrament. But, you know, we don't sit there with washcloth and soap and water and wash you. It's a symbolic act.

[15:10] Sins washed away through the grace of God. John was talking about his act was to call people into the water.

The act of Jesus is to call people into power. Holy Spirit.

Spirit means wind. Breath of God. Inspiration. Strength. Power.

That's what John is talking about. Now, some of you are old enough to remember those heady days of the 1970s, 80s, when the charismatic swept into the mainline churches.

It was interesting, wasn't it? People did a lot of things that we're not used to. People spoke in tongues. There was prophecy.

[16:09] A word from God. There were miraculous healings. Words of knowledge. How did you know that? I don't know. The Holy Spirit just gave it to me.

Words of wisdom. Of knowledge. It was a heady time in the church. And some of you were in St. Andrew's during that period of time. And you had a wonderful priest, Bob Haskell.

Who said, yes for the Holy Spirit. Held up the sign. He's still holding up the sign in Albany. Yes for the Holy Spirit.

Well, I'll tell you, that movement hit the Episcopal Church like a sledgehammer. I was in seminary in 1970. I had just come out of the Marine Corps.

I just wanted to get trained to be a clergyman. I didn't really want to argue about theology. Well, we had evangelicals who thought anybody that spoke in tongues was certainly demonic.

[17:12] We had charismatics who thought that anybody without tongues didn't get it. And we had Anglo-Catholics who figured if you just swing a little incense, everything will be fine.

Well, in a sense, that was rich, though. It was rich to be able to figure out what is God doing in our lives. Why do we have this church?

And why do all these strange things happen? Well, you know, today, if you haven't noticed, the anesthetic has kicked in.

We're a little bit lethargic when it comes to what God wants to do personally in our lives. We're in a theological slumber.

So let's look at this again. What does it mean to be baptized in the Holy Spirit? For John the Baptist, it meant recognizing that the Messiah is coming imminently, getting ready, and let him empower us to proclaim that message.

[18:22] That's what it meant for John the Baptist. For us, it's a breaking through the lethargy into a dynamic relationship with God.

Everything around us, the secular culture, our families, everybody wants us to just sit down and shut up when it comes to God.

How many times have you heard it? Religion's a private thing. We don't talk about it. Well, that is a tool of Satan. There's a way of talking about it that's not healthy, but there's a way of talking about it that's important to God.

So Satan's weapon against us is theological lethargy, ignorance, and apathy. By the way, a priest went to a new parish, not this parish, and the bishop said, you've got two things to figure out how to do in that parish.

They are ignorant and they're pathetic. They don't want to know about the gospel, and they definitely don't want to do anything about it. So the priest went in and he said, okay, apathy, ignorance, ignorance, apathy.

[19:36] He preached his first sermon against ignorance and apathy. And as the senior warden was walking out, the priest said, what do you think about my sermon? And the senior warden said, I don't know and I don't care.

Okay, so how do we wake up from this slumber? How do we wake from the slumber?

Well, point three, application. This is Advent, in case you hadn't noticed. It's interesting, I came in this morning and I put on my vestments, and then Deacon John came in, he kind of looked at me funny.

And guess what? I was in green. I forgot it's Advent, so I had to change my duds. Advent is reminding us of something.

It's reminding us to prepare, to make ready. And so we need to make ready. I was telling some people the other night that when I was in the flying business, if you were going to hit a target, there were three parts to the play.

[20:50] Part one, getting there. Part two, dropping the bombs, supposedly on an ammunition dump. Dropping the bombs, that's part two.

Part three, getting home. Each one of those are pretty important. Well, it's the same thing with the Holy Spirit. How do we get to Him?

What do we do as He shines upon us? And how do we go home full of the Spirit? Well, it's a four-part dance.

Okay, we're now, we're going into a four-part dance. The first part of the dance with preparation is called the alarm. The alarm goes off. Right?

Now, often we hit snooze. That means we need to crank up the volume. But the alarm, something happens in our lives that God uses to get our attention.

[21:48] Everything falls apart on us, and we're forced to deal with ourselves. So, God knows what we need, and sometimes puts the pressure on us in such a way that we have to turn toward Him.

We have no other choice. Sometimes we buck it. We rebel against it. Some of us who are really hard-headed may spend years rebelling against God.

But God is very patient. He'll keep the pressure on. The alarm continues to go off.

Eventually, though, we hear that alarm, and what do we do with it? That's where the metanoia comes in.

To turn to Christ means to deal with the junk that keeps us from hearing Him. Thomas Edison. A lot of you studied Thomas Edison in school.

[22:49] There's a museum for Thomas Edison down in Florida. Well, he made one of the greatest statements ever made by humankind. He said, and he was not a man of a lot of words, by the way.

He said, In day-to-day life, you will have many opportunities to keep your mouth shut. Take advantage of every one of them. You know, and it goes both ways. Sometimes we should speak up and we don't. Sometimes all we do is speak. We have a cute little granddaughter who's a motor mouth. We've been watching over these little kids this weekend. Well, when she wakes up, what happens? She's talking. Well, sometimes with us, we're so full of words that we can't hear.

So, metanoia is a way of saying, I confess, Lord, that I'm not doing this right. I'm causing more trouble than I should. I want to turn away from that.

[23:52] So, first one, the alarm. Second, the metanoia. Third, receive. Ask and you shall receive. For me, I asked, in the middle of this charismatic junk going on, Lord, I'm an evangelical.

I don't want to have to bother with this. And so God put in my hand a book called 9 o'clock in the morning by Dennis Bennett, an Episcopal priest who went through a baptism in the Holy Spirit. Golly, it came to visit me, that book, sent by the Holy Spirit. I asked for the baptism of the Holy Spirit and He baptized me in power.

He wants to do that for everybody. So, they got the alarm where He gets our attention. We've got the metanoia where we get rid of the junk so we can hear Him. Then we get the baptism of the Holy Spirit filling us with His love.

And then the last is living out the victory. You know, if you live out the victory day to day in little things, God will move in big things.

[25:05] Do the little things, God brings the big things. Living a victory. So, I've run out of time. We are at the conclusion.

Can you imagine? And nobody's asleep yet. I can't believe it. Okay. Christmas, in case you haven't noticed, is coming. This is a time to prepare, not with a general anesthetic, but with the Holy Spirit giving us breath, giving us wind power, giving us the chance to share the gospel so that when we get to Christmas, we'll have trouble filling our pews because there will be so many people.

we're going to ask God to bless us for Christmas by so filling us with the Holy Spirit that people are drawn to come here. And so I say to you, receive the grace of God by faith in His Son and you will be saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.