

12.6.20 A2 Shocking Preparation for the Son of God

- On a summer day, there are two ways to get into the cold water of a swimming pool or lake
 - There are the people who slip into the cold water gradually – first a toe, then a foot, then the legs, and finally with a lot of shivering and chattering, dipping the rest of their body in
 - Then there are the other people. They know that the water is cold and will take some getting used to, but instead of the slow, drawn-out adjustment, they take a running leap, and dive right into the water to get the shock over with
 - Which kind are you? How many of you ease yourselves into the cold water? How many are more likely to just jump in and get the frigid shock over with?
- I have to tell you today, that the Gospel of Mark is the jump-in-the-cold water kind of guy who dives right in knowing that you will soon get over his gospel's abrupt and shocking beginning
 - Unlike the gospel of Luke who carefully prepares us for the ministry of Jesus with the visitation of the angel first to Elizabeth and then Mary, and then the birth of Jesus in the manger, and then finally the ministry of Jesus...
 - Unlike the gospel of Matthew who also carefully prepares us for the ministry of Jesus with the visitation of the foreigners, the Magi, who come and worship Jesus, and then finally the ministry of Jesus...
 - And so unlike the gospel of John who carefully prepares us for the ministry of Jesus with a deep, deep proclamation about the eternal Word of God that participates in the very creation of all that exists, and that then dares to take on flesh to live in the midst of its creation...
 - Unlike those other three gospels, Mark gives us very little preparation for the ministry of Jesus, and he jumps right in the deep end
 - In just a few verses, Mark declares that John the Baptist who is dressed like the long-ago prophet Elijah bursts on the scene, draws crowds of people from the surrounding towns and cities out into the wilderness, calls

them to repentance and the redirection of their lives with a symbolic washing of the Jordan River's water, and then John points to someone who is just about to arrive – a person who is SO Godly that he can call down the Holy Spirit of heaven onto their lives

- And this person, Mark tells us right up front *in the very first verse*, is Jesus the Christ, that is the Messiah, who is no one less than the Son of God!
- Now today we are in the season of advent, and the word “advent” means “just about to arrive or appear”
- This advent, this imminent arrival, this one who is about to appear, the gospel of Mark tells us through the ministry of John the Baptist, is best prepared for by repentant and redirected lives
 - But we haven't finished our Christmas shopping yet!
 - The Hallmark channel has been playing Christmas movies since Halloween and there are still more Christmas movies to go!
 - And the coronavirus is making shopping, Christmas parties, the Christmas meal, and even the Christmas Eve services so very difficult to plan!
 - But Mark has a different idea
 - During this advent season – during this time before Christmas, Mark wants us – Mark EXPECTS us in our lives to be humbled, just as John the Baptist was humbled by Jesus who was about to appear, saying “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. [1:7]”
- Then like the cold water that shocks us, Mark throws us immediately into the deep end with the ministry of Jesus
 - Mark immediately confronts us with a shocking Jesus after his advent, after his appearance, after his arrival – a shocking and fast-acting Jesus who gathers disciples, tells bewildering parables, eats with sinners and all kinds of undeserving people, heals both the faithful and the foreigners, and offends both the religious establishment and the Roman empire so much, that they even put Jesus to death
 - Meanwhile, although from the very beginning Mark has declared that Jesus is the Son of God, ALL THROUGH the

unfolding story, no one really figures out what it REALLY means for Jesus to be the son of God until we read to the very end.

- And then finally, while Jesus is on the cross after being ridiculed and taunted, and after he has uttered the mournful words of Psalm 22 and cried out and breathed his last, the least likely person of all – the Roman commander of Jesus’ execution declares, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”
- The Roman officer of all people tells us that this man, the one crucified in shame and pain is the son of God
- And the coming of THAT SON OF GOD is the one who we are called to prepare for in the midst of all the hustle and bustle of all humility – the God who not only was born, the God who not only had a ministry full of surprises, but the God who has so shockingly died for us
- Just as the Gospel of Mark begins so abruptly in our reading for today, it also ends abruptly
- Instead of feel-good resurrection scenes and appearances, three days after his crucifixion first the women, then the disciples went and found that Jesus’ tomb was empty
 - But there at the empty tomb an angel told Jesus’ followers: “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that *he is going ahead of you to Galilee*; there you will see him, just as he told you. [Mk. 16’6-7]”
 - In Mark, Jesus was not there to meeting them in Jerusalem, instead the crucified and risen Son of God was going ahead of his disciples to *go back and meet them in Galilee where they actually lived*
 - And that is what Jesus continues to do today
 - Today the Jesus Christ, the Son of God promises *to meet us where WE live*
 - The crucified and risen Son of God humbles us and loves us by coming to us in our gathering in his name...
 - And in this very gathering the crucified and risen Son of God comes to us in the faith-creating Word, and in the Meal and Water together with the Spirit-filled promise

- And the crucified and risen Son of God humbles us and loves us by reminding us again and again that *he not only meets us here*, but he also meets us in the midst of the hungry, the poor, and the sick and suffering...