

"My Son"

Mark 1:4-11

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Baptism of the Lord, Year B

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Mark 1:4-11

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "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. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

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.

Prayer.

There is a bit of irony,
Regarding our gospel reading from Mark,
For those of us who celebrate
The Baptism of the Lord on
The first Sunday following the Epiphany of the Lord:
Epiphany is the season we recall the manifestation of Jesus to the world.
Yet Mark's account of the baptism of Jesus is deeply couched in secrecy,
A larger, consistent theme in this Gospel.
(We've all heard of the messianic secret, haven't we?)
In Matthew, and elsewhere,
We read that God's booming voice proclaimed to one and all:
"This is my Son,"
whereas, here today, it almost sounds like a hushed, private whisper:
"You are my Son."
Likewise, here in Mark,
It appears that Jesus is the only one to witness the heavens torn apart and the descent of the Spirit.
Elsewhere, this story is more objective;
Here, it's personal.

Too often,
We find ourselves as consumers of information
But rarely does it sink in below skin deep.
Whether we are in a high school classroom
Or attending an employee continuing education event,
We can sit and absorb only so much
Before our minds begin to wonder and our attention wanes.
Boring!
But draw me in with a story;
A personal story that bridges the objective perimeter fence,
And I'm all ears.
And I'll remember it, too.
Tell me what it is,
And I'll forget the details.
Tell me how it makes you feel,
And I'll associate that memory with my own feelings,
Which I'll never forget it.

In today's gospel account
Mark makes the baptism of Jesus personal,
So we don't forget.
"You are my son"
the serious reader of the Psalms hears
and immediately is returned by their memory to the second chapter:
"You are my Son; today I have become your Father,"¹ says the Lord
when he installed the King on Zion, God's holy hill.
The historians of King David in our midst will remember
The Lord's promise to "raise up an offspring to succeed you,
Who will come from your own body,
And I will establish his kingdom, ...
I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever ...
I will be his father, and he will be my son."²
To raise up
The author of Acts confirms
... anasteeo, from the Hebrew, ...
is fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus:
"What God promised our fathers
he has fulfilled for us, their children
by raising up Jesus."³

¹ Psalm 2:7 (niv)

² 2 Samuel 7:12-14 (niv)

"You are my Son," we hear
and every parent in the audience,
indeed, everyone whose had a parent, in the audience
sits up, and takes notice:
You are my son.
You are my daughter.
I am your son.
I am your daughter.
Yes, we hear,
And we understand
The intimacy between God and his Son.

This intimacy is vitally important;
And the sacrament of Christian Baptism makes every effort to bottle it.
When we are baptized
We share a common, intimate moment with God.
The attention of our heavenly Father
Is undivided:
It rests solely and singly
Upon you.
The creator of the universe
Stops for a moment
- maybe a galaxy doesn't get made that moment -
and God turns his attention to you.
You are now God's son or daughter.
You are entrusted to God's stewardship.
God will raise you up,
Teaching you the values and beliefs of this family (known as Christians),
And in the end,
God will leave you with an inheritance:
The gift of eternal life.
Not immortality,
But an eternal, heavenly existence with God.
Remember, indeed!
Remember your baptism,
And be thankful.

There is a second observation I'd like to make:
Only twice in this gospel of Mark is the word phrase "torn apart" used.
The phrase is "eiden scizomenou"
The other occasion is when Jesus is crucified.

³ Acts 13:32-33 (niv)

When he draws his final breath
The curtain in the Temple,
That would woven into it's design were representations of stars and other cosmic bodies,
Is torn in two.
Eiden Scizomenou is deconstruction by a constructive God.
This is not God's usual course of action.
This isn't in character for God to tear apart something like the perfect heaven he created
Simply to reach in and intercede with the affairs of humankind.
Yet, here in the beautiful created order,
Related to us in the first chapter of Genesis today
(not merely by coincidence, I might add)
is torn an imperfection
at the beginning of Jesus ministry
linking him to the consummate moment
and reason for his incarnation
- his crucifixion and resurrection -
that all might be saved through him.
Even though a tear is repaired,
It is never able to return to it's original perfect condition.
There is forever a mark,
A record, of God's divine action.
That mark is baptism.
God goes to cosmic ends,
Even creating imperfections in his otherwise perfect creation,
To reach out and claim every one of us
As God's own children.
More plainly put,
God ripped up heaven
Just for you and me.
Now, that's personal.

It is impossible
To consider the baptism of Jesus,
Especially as conveyed in this gospel of Mark,
And not see just exactly how personal God makes the relationship with each and every one of
us.
We are not some hobby;
We are God's ultimate concern.
And God is willing to go to any ends,
Including ripping apart heaven itself,
Just to be a part of your life and mine,
Just to be able to lead you home.

God is even willing to send his Son, Jesus,
That no one every be lost again.
Baptism makes it personal;
Makes it a whole different game,
Begging the question,
"what are you going to do about it?"

The word of the Lord, as it has come to me.
Thanks be to God.
Amen.