

# Hopkins South Monterey

## United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon

Feb 14, 2021

Pastor Kelsey

### Mark 1:9-15

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 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. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

### Prayer & Sermon

*Gracious and Loving God,*

*Thank you for this time to be together. Thank you for this time with you. Bless this time we have to spend with your Word. Help us to hear what you know we need to hear, and help us to put what we learn about you and ourselves into action. In the name of the Son and Spirit, Amen.*

### **Beloved Is Where We Begin, A Blessing by Jan Richardson**

If you would enter  
into the wilderness,  
do not begin

without a blessing.  
Do not leave  
without hearing  
who you are:  
Beloved,  
named by the One  
who has traveled this path  
before you.  
Do not go  
without letting it echo  
in your ears,  
and if you find  
it is hard  
to let it into your heart,  
do not despair.  
That is what  
this journey is for.  
I cannot promise  
this blessing will free you  
from danger,  
from fear,  
from hunger  
or thirst,  
from the scorching  
of sun  
or the fall  
of the night.  
But I can tell you  
that on this path  
there will be help.  
I can tell you  
that on this way  
there will be rest.  
I can tell you  
that you will know  
the strange graces  
that come to our aid  
only on a road  
such as this,  
that fly to meet us

bearing comfort  
and strength,  
that come alongside us  
for no other cause  
than to lean themselves  
toward our ear  
and with their  
curious insistence  
whisper our name:  
*Beloved.*  
*Beloved.*  
*Beloved.*

Being Beloved. That is what this passage is all about. Yes, it is a short passage that tells of 3 short stories of the happenings at the beginning of Jesus's Ministry and the middle one of them tells of Jesus being tested in the wilderness by Satan, and the last one tells of John being arrested, which we know will end with his execution... and yes, this passage is about our belovedness experienced through God's presence with us. That may seem a bit sideways from the surface, but it's true!

The first part of the passage is what sets the stage. We spent some time with this first part of the passage six weeks ago now for Baptism of our Lord Sunday and we talked about it again last week as one of the passages that is referenced with the story of the Transfiguration. We've been here and talked about it in depth a few ways, so I won't dig into every detail of the text again, but I will highlight the important parts that shine when we consider this part of that short story alongside the other two read this morning. We know from vs 14 that this series of events is what marks the beginning of Jesus's ministry. First, Jesus's baptism, then the testing in the wilderness, and lastly John's arrest and Jesus proclaiming the Good News of God. At his baptism, Jesus comes from the backwater town to this river that marked the dividing line between the wilderness and the promised land in the times of Moses and Elijah. Jesus comes from this unexpected place, an origin that means the people are likely to dismiss him as a nobody, and goes to this sacred place to be baptized. And in that moment, God speaks to Jesus, "You are my son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." In this moment Jesus comes onto the stage to start his ministry that we know will not be easy as he will face criticism, challenges, bullies, and ultimately persecution leading to death. In that moment of beginning, God claims Jesus as God's own beloved son. He claims Jesus as his beloved, and with that promises to be with him along the journey to come. It is this promise of belovedness and presence that goes with Jesus as he is driven out into the wilderness. God claiming Jesus as son and beloved is significant in many ways, but as we think about it being the words that go with Jesus into the wilderness where he is tested and in danger of the wild beasts, perhaps those words given to Jesus also acted as encouraging and strengthening words to sustain Jesus through the trial ahead.

That claim of belovedness that promised Jesus company on the journey is not all that takes Jesus into the time of testing in the wilderness. When I hear about Jesus

being in the wilderness for 40 days tested by Satan, I know I usually think of Jesus being alone in that time, I have always thought about it as this time of trial by fire and tribulation that Jesus must face to fully live into his call and solidify his understanding of his role as Messiah and Savior. I guess I have always thought about it like that scene in an action movie where the main hero has to go and face the villain one-on-one and they really duke it out and no one is sure if they will make it, but then in the end they come strutting out in slow motion with, like, explosions and fire popping off behind them. Unsurprisingly, that Hollywood picture is not quite what verses 12-13 of this passage describe. Instead of Jesus being cut off and sent on his own to become the hero the world needed, Jesus is sent with the blessing of God's claim as beloved son, brought to the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, and while he is in the wilderness for those 40 days, he is served by the angels. Jesus was not alone in this time in the wilderness. God continues to be with Jesus through those times of testing and transformation.

It doesn't say if anything was important about Jesus leaving the wilderness, so I think it's safe to assume he didn't leave in a wave of explosion and fire, but just casually walked back to Galilee. This brings us to the final scene in the passage. John was arrested which brings Jesus back to Galilee, officially starting his ministry with his first, short, sermon: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." Now as Jesus is taking his place in sharing his teachings and healings with the people, Jesus is now sharing about the presence or nearness of God to everyone. We know from the previous scenes that God has claimed and remains with Jesus on his journey, and now Jesus is sharing about God's presence with all who can hear it. Which turns the story to us.

Jesus's journey with God in these short 7 verses also tells us of where God is for us. Through our baptism or a coming to faith moment, God claims us as a beloved child. God stays with us in the wilderness times of our lives, times of hardship and testing or times of transformation, God is with us through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and those that come to serve us or help sustain us through that journey. Then we are called to share about God's work in our lives, transforming the broken pieces and bringing us to trust in God and the Good News of Jesus.

This kind of journey with God is a familiar one. I imagine most who have committed to their faith have had a moment that they truly realize how much God loves them and wants to be a part of their lives. Many believers can also think of a time that they felt God's presence and help through a wilderness time. For me, my moment where the clouds (figuratively) opened and God affirmed my belovedness is the moment I first heard the call to ministry. I had just graduated high school, I had just started getting serious about my faith, I was at Christian camp, and in a quiet moment, God told me, "you could do this." Simple words with a heavy meaning that eventually lead to this exact moment of me up here. But it is that clear interaction with God, that unmistakable moment of God giving me affirmation of my place in his plans, that time and again I think back to and draw strength from when I feel far from God, when I doubt myself or my faith, when living out my call brings challenges or hard days, when I am in the wilderness in times of testing, wandering, or transformation. I have plenty of examples of God bringing me help while I am in the wilderness. This year especially. I am thankful for the help that I was gifted through Pastor Dominic this week as we got to co-officiate my first funeral to honor Marrion as well as we can during these crazy times. Marrion

herself is a good example of someone sustained through a time of wilderness with God's help. She was gifted at birth with her strength and perseverance, but she also told of how much God helped her through that hardest of years when Trayton, Todd and Hal passed within months of each other. The ways she relied on God's presence with her continued into these last few months as she got the hard news of her diagnosis and began to decline. Even after all her losses and personal trials, Marrion's favorite hymn was "How Great Thou Art." She felt God with her through the worst of it and on the other side of those hard times, she shared of God's good news.

This passage reminds us that as God met Jesus in this moment on the edge of his next chapter starting ministry and in the challenge of the wilderness that God will meet us wherever we are in our faith journey. When we are eager and ready, but also when we are reluctant, when we have doubts, when we are weary. Wherever we are in our journey, God claims us as his child and sees our goodness, sees our potential, sees our worthiness and helps us continue on our journey. It is then up to us to respond. Jesus preaches in verse 15, "the Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." These verbs, repent and believe have come to be used in some strong ways in modern times that now these words carry a bit of a different meaning than they did when the Gospel of Mark was written. Jesus was not saying "Repent and Believe" in a demanding, fire and brimstone way, in a "Repent and believe, or else!" kind of way. Jesus was extending an invitation of repentance meaning "come into a new way of thinking based on this new kind of Kingdom that Jesus is bringing," and an invitation to believe, or trust, in the powerful impact God's Kingdom can have on your life. It is more like Jesus was saying, "The Kingdom of God has come near, let yourself be transformed and trust in the Good News."

This passage is the one chosen for the first Sunday in Lent as it is the reminder we need to go into our own time of 40 days of growing closer to God and strengthening our faith. Above all, as we go into Lent to do that work, we are to remember that we are God's beloved child and God is pleased in who we are. Then, we can remember that God will be with us along every step of the way, the Holy Spirit guiding and our own angels that help us along the way. Lastly, our goal in growing closer to God and expanding our faith is to bring the Kingdom of God into our lives, be transformed by it, and trust that the Good News that Jesus shared is our hope. At the foundation of all that simply remember, you are so beloved.

I invite you to hear the blessing by Jan Richardson once more.

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I cannot promise  
this blessing will free you  
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from the scorching  
of sun  
or the fall  
of the night.  
But I can tell you  
that on this path  
there will be help.  
I can tell you  
that on this way  
there will be rest.  
I can tell you  
that you will know  
the strange graces  
that come to our aid  
only on a road  
such as this,  
that fly to meet us  
bearing comfort  
and strength,  
that come alongside us  
for no other cause  
than to lean themselves  
toward our ear  
and with their  
curious insistence  
whisper our name:  
Beloved.  
Beloved.  
Beloved.

Let us pray.

We believe in a God who is everywhere and right here,  
Bigger than the sky and in the smallest details,  
All at once and in every moment.

We believe that God meets us where we are—  
In heartbreak and high hopes,  
Around crowded tables and in quiet homes,  
In joy and in suffering,  
In loneliness and in connection,  
In sanctuaries and in living rooms,  
In marches and in waiting rooms.

We believe that nothing we do or leave undone  
Can distance us from God's love.  
God is forever drawing us close and pulling us in.  
Again and again, God meets us where we are  
And invites us into wholeness.  
Thanks be to God for a love like that.