

## Sermon on Mark 1:4-13 by John R. Collins

### Mark 1:4-13 (CEB)

<sup>4</sup>John was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. <sup>5</sup>Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. <sup>6</sup>John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He announced, "One stronger than I am is coming after me. I'm not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>9</sup>About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. <sup>10</sup>While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. <sup>11</sup>And there was a voice from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness."

<sup>12</sup>At once the Spirit forced Jesus out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup>He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among the wild animals, and the angels took care of him.

### SERMON

**UPSET:** I was unnerved and unsettled by the events at the Capitol building on Wednesday. And I have heard from many of you that you feel the same way.

**DEEPENING:** I would love to tell you that everything is going to be OK, but I can't.

You've heard me quote the medieval theologian, Julian of Norwich as saying that "all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." But she was talking about how it would all be well in the end.

The sentence in that quote starts with the phrase “It is true that sin is the cause of all this suffering.” Julian lived in the middle ages, she was familiar with the fact that everything in this life can all too easily go to hell in a handbasket.

Likewise, the Christian proclamation has at its heart the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven where he sits at the right hand of God.

But we can't ignore the fact that he was flogged, and whipped, and crucified first.

None of this alters the truth that, in the end, Jesus will rule on earth as he does in heaven and that evil, and sin and the suffering, and disease, and violence, and pain, and death that they bring will be no more.

But it does mean there's no guarantee that everything is going to be alright in the meantime, and every reason to believe that some, if not many things are going to go wrong.

Often seriously wrong.

So I can't assure you that everything in this life will be OK. Because it probably won't.

**SUDDEN SHIFT AND GOSPEL:** But I can assure you that God loves you and will continue to love you no matter what happens.

Today we celebrate Jesus' baptism. The question sometimes arises: “John's baptism was for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus was without sin. Why did Jesus receive John's baptism?”

Jesus was baptized not for his sake but for ours. Jesus is not only Lord and Savior, but the pathfinder who goes before us and shows us the way. He is the one who stands in our place and does for us what we could not do for ourselves. He is the Messiah who represents his people before God. He is the one who stands in for the many.

And therefore, what God said to him God also says to us.

And what God said to him was: "You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness."

And what God says to each and every one of us is "You are my child, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness."

I had a hard time in school, not with classes but with social interactions.

I did not excel at team sports. I didn't even rise to adequacy in team sports.

I was a short scrawny kid with obscure interests.

I was a nerd and a geek back when those were not considered good things.

But I made it. And a big part of the reason I made it was that I had parents who loved me. And I knew they loved me.

They didn't always approve of what I did, but even when they were unhappy with something I had done, it was always clear that they loved me no matter what. They simply wanted me to do better for my own sake.

Whether or not you had loving parents growing up, I am here to tell you that you now have a loving parent in God our Father. Jesus called our God Father and taught us to do the same.

You are dearly loved. In you, God finds Happiness. God doesn't always approve of what you do, but God loves you unconditionally and wants what's best for you.

After Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit forced him out into the wilderness for the sake of the work he needed to do. It wasn't easy, but God cared for him and saw him through it. After Jesus died at the hands of those who hated and despised him, God vindicated him by raising him from the dead.

I can't tell you that everything is going to be OK in this life.

But I can tell you that God loves you.

I can tell you that God will be with you throughout this life no matter what.

And I can tell you that if you choose to follow King Jesus and cast your lot with him, then this life is not the end.

If you choose to follow Jesus in whatever limited, stumbling, staggering, way you can manage, then, at the end of this life, God will see you through death and into the new creation where all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.

Amen.

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Resources Consulted Included: *Preaching Through the Christian Year B* by Fred B. Caraddock, John H. Hayes, Carl R. Holladay, and Gene M. Tucker; *A Lector's Guide and Commentary to the Revised Common Lectionary — Year B* by J. Ted Blakeley; *Belief: Mark, a Theological Commentary on the Bible* by William C. Placker; *Mark for Everyone* by N. T. Wright, and *Texts for Preaching: a Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV — Year B* by Walter Brueggemann, Charles B. Cousar, Beverly R. Gaventa, and James D. Newsome.