

Sermon 2-21-21

Paul Purdue preaching

In Mark's telling, Jesus is baptized, spends 40 days in the wilderness, and starts announcing the Good News of God's Kin-dom in just eight verses. Mark fits Jesus' baptism, temptation, and ministry launch into three tweets with a few characters to spare!

The Baptism Tweet: John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. Just as Jesus came out of the water, Jesus saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descended like a dove. A voice came from heaven, "You are my child, beloved; I delight in you." #Baptism #Beloved

The Temptation Tweet: Immediately, the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness for forty days where Jesus was tempted by Satan. Jesus communed with the wilderness animals. Angels attended to Jesus. #Temptation #Wilderness #Lent

The Kin-dom Launch Tweet: John is arrested. Jesus begins preaching, "The time is now. Change your hearts and lives. God's kin-dom has come near. Trust the good news." #John-arrested #the-time-is-now #kin-dom-launch

Each one of Mark's simple, almost naked, verses could become a sermon inviting deeper theological ruminations.

Why did Jesus need to be baptized?

Did John sprinkle, pour, or immerse Jesus in the Jordan River?

Did anyone besides Jesus see heaven splitting open and the Spirit descend?

Do you know you are beloved, God's child, and that God delights in you?

Why does the Spirit push Jesus out into the wilderness?

What clarity might come during a longer prayerful pilgrimage?

If our Lord faced temptations, what temptations woo us?

Did Jesus commune with the wild animals like St. Francis did?

Did the angels literally serve Jesus or is that figurative language?

Did the injustice of John's arrest galvanize Jesus to action?

Did Christ come as a solo actor or to launch God's continual kin-dom movement?

Is now the time?

How are we bringing good news to our neighbors, rivals, and enemies?

What do I need to change in my hearts and in my living?

What does it mean to trust the good news?

Matthew and Luke give us so many more details. They tell us that Jesus fasted. They detail Jesus' verbal sparring with Satan over the use of power and how to interpret the Bible. All of Jesus' adversaries quote the Bible. Mark's Gospel is sparse. Where? The wilderness! With who? Wilderness creatures, devils, and angels. What? Temptation! How long? 40 days!

Is there a lesson in Mark's simplicity? Maybe following Jesus is simpler than we sometimes make it! We scribes and professional Christians love theological formulas and details. Perhaps, our love of formulas, creeds, and answers distracts us from following Christ? At some basic level is not following Jesus simply doing the things that Jesus did? Now theology matters, and bad theology kills, but are we not found faithful when we simply apply Jesus' two great commandments to every relationship we have and every decision we make? Is it as simple as asking: "Does this attitude or action honor God? Am I showing radical love to my neighbor? Am I acting like Jesus right now?"

Bishop Dick Wills once told us how he left a big theology conference after the first day. He quietly slipped out because none of the keynote speakers had talked about love. He did not want to judge or even name the group, but he knew he did not belong in a movement that was not centered in love. That might sound simplistic to some and cowardly to others. It struck me as simply Christ-like.

Most churches and professional Christians focus more on orthodoxy (right belief) than orthopraxis (doing the right things). Father Richard Rohr notes that *"The Apostles Creed does not once mention love, service, hope, the least of these, or even forgiveness—anything, actually, that is remotely actionable. It is a theological statement with no mission statement... This may in some way explain Christianity's often dismal record in imitating Jesus's actual life and teaching."*

In eight simple verses, Mark describes 3 foundational actions: baptism, pilgrimage or retreat, and belonging to the kin-dom movement. These three speak to our core identity as children of God.

1. In Baptism, God names us: *"You are my child, beloved; I delight in you."*
2. In life, temptations will come. Devils, systems, and struggles will try to lure us from God's deeper calling, our truest identity. Time alone with God reconnects us with God's Love and our identity as beloved children of God. We need daily mediation, weekly worship, and yearly retreat to remember who we are and what life is ultimately about!
3. When we belong to God's kin-dom (communing with God's Love in worship and pouring love into others in life), God comes near to us. (Matthew 25). God's abiding Love seasons our hearts and lives with Love! Love woos us into our belovedness: and knowing our Belovedness we become free to love others. Love permeates God's kin-dom.

After describing Jesus' Baptism, Temptation, and Ministry Launch in three tweets, Mark spends 16 chapters telling us what Jesus actually did. Jesus recruits helpers. Jesus heals people. Jesus redefines forgiveness. Jesus heals people. Jesus dines with those cast out of the church. Jesus teaches about bursting old wineskins. Jesus breaks church rules. Jesus rejects more rules. Jesus organizes a ministry team. Jesus is attacked by church leaders. Jesus teaches. Jesus stills a storm. Jesus heals more people. The church folks try to kill Jesus. Jesus sends out the disciples to preach and heal people. Jesus mourns the political murder of John the Baptist. Jesus feeds 5000

people. Jesus prays. Jesus heals people. There are ten more chapters like that, but you get the picture. Is it possible that we prefer theological analysis so that we can avoid Jesus' deeper call to radically love and serve others?

Maybe our faith could be simpler:

1. You are God's beloved, God's child in whom God delights. #Beloved
2. People, systems, and things will woo you away from your core identity as a Beloved Child of God. Make time to remember who you are. Allow Love to soak so deeply into your souls that it changes your heart and life. #Through-Love-Prayer
3. Abide in God's kin-dom movement. Do the things Jesus did. Worship God. Love others. Bring healing everywhere you go! #Through-Serving.

Perhaps, a life of Love matters more than creeds and formulas. (Matthew 7:12 & 22:40)

Maybe, a deep and simple faith might be our best compass.

Surely, Love in action is God's path through any season.

Remember, you are God's beloved, God's child, God delights in you!  
Some will try to woo you away from your identity as a beloved child of God.  
Take the time to dwell in who God made you to be.  
Love will heal your heart and life.  
Build God's kin-dom; love God and bring healing everywhere you go! Amen.