

**Mark 1:4-11**  
**January 7, '18**

**“NEW YEAR’S EVOLUTIONS”**

**ON THE LITURGICAL CALENDAR, TODAY IS THE DAY TO  
OBSERVE THE BAPTISM OF JESUS.**

**HERE AT EASTMINSTER, IT IS ALSO THE DAY WE ORDAIN &  
INSTALL NEW OFFICERS IN THE CHURCH.**

**IT IS VERY APPROPRIATE THAT THE TWO COINCIDE.**

**JESUS WAS NEVER ORDAINED.**

**HIS BAPTISM REPRESENTS HIS CALL FROM GOD – A CALL TO  
SERVICE.**

**SO IT IS WITH US.**

**IN OUR OWN BAPTISM, GOD CALLS US & GOD CLAIMS US AS  
GOD’S OWN.**

**IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, A PERSON ISN’T CALLED TO  
SERVE CHRIST WITH THEIR ORDINATION.**

**THAT HAPPENS IN BAPTISM.**

**EVERY ONE OF US WHO HAS BEEN BAPTIZED HAS BEEN CALLED  
INTO MINISTRY – CALLED TO SERVE GOD BY SERVING OTHERS.**

**IN ORDINATION, INDIVIDUALS ARE CALLED TO A PARTICULAR  
REALM OF SERVICE, WHETHER IT BE AS MINISTER OF WORD &  
SACRAMENT OR AS DEACONS OR AS ELDERS.**

**SO TODAY, AS WE CONSIDER BOTH THE BAPTISM OF JESUS &  
THE ORDINATION & INSTALLATION OF NEW OFFICERS, I’D LIKE TO  
TAKE A LOOK AT THIS PASSAGE IN MARK & SEE WHAT THESE BRIEF  
VERSES TELL US ABOUT OUR OWN CALLING.**

**WE’VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT “BEGINNINGS” A LOT LATELY.**

**JUST TWO WEEKS AGO, WE TALKED ABOUT THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS & THEN LAST WEEK THERE WAS THE BEGINNING OF A NEW YEAR.**

**AND HERE WE FIND OURSELVES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MINISTRY OF JESUS.**

**THAT MINISTRY BEGINS SO QUICKLY IN MARK'S GOSPEL.**

**WE HAVE NO SHEPHERDS, NO ANGELS, NO WISE MEN, NOT A SINGLE WORD HERE ABOUT MARY & JOSEPH.**

**WE'RE GIVEN NO GENEALOGY – NO LIST OF ANCESTORS OF JESUS.**

**WE DON'T EVEN GET THAT DELIGHTFUL LITTLE STORY ABOUT JESUS IN THE TEMPLE AT THE AGE OF 12 WHEN HIS PARENTS ARE IN A PANIC BECAUSE THEY CAN'T FIND HIM ON THEIR TRIP TO THE BIG CITY.**

**MARK GIVES US NONE OF THAT.**

**HE JUST STARTS OFF WITH A BANG & THEN KEEPS RIGHT ON GOING.**

**MARK'S FAVORITE TRANSITIONAL VERB IS OBVIOUSLY "IMMEDIATELY."**

**HE USES IT MORE THAN 40 TIMES IN JUST 16 CHAPTERS AND 11 TIMES IN THIS FIRST CHAPTER ALONE!**

**WE'RE LEFT TRYING TO CATCH OUR BREATH TO STAY WITH HIM AS HE ABRUPTLY & SWIFTLY MOVES US FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER & ONE SCENE TO THE NEXT.**

**MARK APPROPRIATELY OPENS HIS GOSPEL WITH THAT VERY WORD WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT.**

**MARK'S VERY FIRST WORDS – JUST PRIOR TO THE ONES WE READ THIS MORNING – ARE “*THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST.*”**

**AND WE TALKED ABOUT THAT OPENING JUST A FEW WEEKS AGO & MARK'S USE OF THE WORD “BEGINNING.”**

**ALL FOUR GOSPELS INCLUDE THIS STORY OF THE BAPTISM OF JESUS.**

**THERE IS AN INTERESTING DIFFERENCE, THOUGH, IN MARK'S ACCOUNT & THAT OF THE OTHERS – ESPECIALLY MATTHEW & LUKE THAT SO CLOSELY PARALLEL MARK'S GOSPEL.**

**WHEN JESUS COMES OUT OF THE WATER, WE'RE TOLD BY BOTH MATTHEW & LUKE THAT THE HEAVENS WERE “*OPENED.*”**

**MARK, ON THE OTHER HAND, SAYS THAT THE HEAVENS WERE – NOT OPENED – BUT “*TORN APART.*”**

**THERE'S AN ENORMOUS DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO.**

**IF YOU OPEN A BOOK, YOU CAN ALSO CLOSE IT.**

**LIKEWISE, IF YOU OPEN A DOOR, YOU CAN CLOSE IT WHENEVER YOU WISH.**

**BUT A BOOK OR A DOOR THAT IS TORN APART IS TORN APART FOREVER.**

**NOTHING ABOUT THAT BOOK – NOTHING ABOUT THAT DOOR – WILL EVER BE THE SAME AGAIN!**

**THE GREEK WORD MARK USES HERE FOR “TEAR APART” IS *SCHITZO* AS IN “SCHISM” OR “SCHIZOPHRENIA” – THE TEARING APART OF A RELATIONSHIP OR THE TEARING APART OF A MIND.**

**MARK CAREFULLY CHOSE THAT PARTICULAR WORD.**

**HE KNEW OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH'S PLEA HUNDREDS OF YEARS BEFORE WHEN HE CRIED OUT TO GOD: “*OH, THAT YOU WOULD TEAR*”**

***OPEN THE HEAVENS AND COME DOWN TO MAKE YOUR NAME KNOWN TO YOUR ENEMIES AND MAKE THE NATIONS TREMBLE AT YOUR PRESENCE.”***

**HERE AT THE JORDAN RIVER THAT CRY FROM ISAIAH - THAT CENTURIES-OLD PLEA - IS FULFILLED.**

**IN THE BAPTISM OF JESUS, THE HEAVENS WERE TORN APART & THINGS WOULD NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN!**

**THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING!**

**THIS MARKS THE BEGINNING OF THE MINISTRY OF JESUS AND IN THAT MINISTRY GOD IS PRESENT & IN OUR MIDST AS NEVER BEFORE!**

**THERE’S ONE MORE FASCINATING ASPECT ABOUT THIS “TEARING APART” IMAGERY.**

**MARK USES THE SAME WORD ONE OTHER TIME IN HIS GOSPEL.**

**AT THE END OF HIS LIFE, JESUS SIMULTANEOUSLY HUNG ON A CROSS BETWEEN TWO THIEVES & BETWEEN HEAVEN & EARTH.**

**MARK SAYS, “*THEN JESUS GAVE A LOUD CRY & BREATHED HIS LAST. AND THE CURTAIN OF THE TEMPLE WAS TORN IN TWO, FROM TOP TO BOTTOM.*”**

**IT WAS TORN APART AS THE HEAVENS HAD BEEN TORN APART AT HIS BAPTISM.**

**THE CURTAIN COULD NEVER BE REPAIRED.**

**YOU MAY RECALL THAT, WITH THE TEARING OF THAT TEMPLE CURTAIN, A ROMAN CENTURION MADE THE PRONOUNCEMENT, “*SURELY THIS WAS THE SON OF GOD.*”**

**HERE, IT’S A PERSON MAKING PRECISELY THE SAME PRONOUNCEMENT THAT GOD MADE AT THE MOMENT OF JESUS’ BAPTISM.**

**THAT ROMAN SOLDIER HAD SOMEHOW HEARD FOR HIMSELF THE WORDS WHISPERED TO JESUS ALONE AT THE JORDAN.**

**THE WORD CAME THROUGH THE TORN PLACE IN THE SKY, THROUGH THE TORN CURTAIN: “*THIS IS MY SON, THE BELOVED, WITH WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED.*”**

**IN THE VERY BEGINNING – IN THE MOMENT HIS MINISTRY STARTED AS HE EMERGED FROM THE WATERS OF THE JORDAN – AND IN THE INSTANT THAT HE TOOK HIS LAST BREATH ON THE CROSS – WE ARE TOLD OF THE TEARING APART OF EVERYTHING THAT WOULD SEPARATE US FROM GOD.**

**IRONICALLY, IT IS IN THE VERY TEARING APART THAT GOD’S PRESENCE IS REVEALED.**

**IT’S IN THE TEARING APART THAT WE CAN FEEL HIM MOST VIVIDLY.**

**IT’S IN THE TEARING APART THAT WE MOST CLEARLY KNOW THAT GOD IS WITH US.**

**DO YOU REMEMBER THE PASSAGE WE REFERRED TO LAST WEEK FROM THE ISAIAH?**

**THE PROPHET SAID – “*DO NOT REMEMBER THE FORMER THINGS, OR CONSIDER THE THINGS OF OLD. I AM ABOUT TO DO A NEW THING;***

**IT’S A WONDERFUL & COMFORTING PROMISE FROM GOD ABOUT BEGINNINGS.**

**BUT IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THOSE WORDS WE READ LAST WEEK ARE THESE WORDS:**

***NOW IT SPRINGS FORTH, DO YOU NOT PERCEIVE IT? I WILL MAKE A WAY IN THE WILDERNESS AND RIVERS IN THE DESERT.*”**

**NOTICE WHAT GOD *DOESN’T* PROMISE HERE.**

**GOD DOESN'T PROMISE TO TAKE US OUT OF THE WILDERNESS  
OR OUT OF THE DESERT.**

**HE SAYS, "I WILL MAKE A WAY IN THE WILDERNESS & RIVERS IN  
THE DESERT."**

**WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT, ISN'T THAT A MORE COMFORTING  
PROMISE?**

**ISN'T THE VERY PRESENCE OF GOD FAR MORE IMPORTANT  
THAN BEING TAKEN OUT OF THE WILDERNESS OR DELIVERED FROM  
THE DESERT?**

**WE ALL EXPERIENCE THOSE THINGS.**

**NONE OF US IS EXEMPT FROM THEM.**

**WE ALL FIND OURSELVES, AT TIMES, IN THE WILDERNESS &  
DESERTS OF LIFE.**

**WE EXPERIENCE THE TORN APART PLACES – THE PLACES  
WHERE THINGS HAVEN'T JUST BEEN OPENED – THEY'VE BEEN RIPPED  
APART & THEY'LL NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN.**

**YOU KNOW WHAT THOSE "TORN APART" PLACES ARE FOR YOU.**

**YOU ALSO KNOW WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO WALK IN THE  
WILDERNESS WHEN IT SEEMS AS IF THERE'S NO WAY OUT.**

**YOU KNOW THE DARKNESS OF THOSE TIMES – HOURS THAT  
BECOME DAYS & DAYS THAT TURN INTO WEEKS OF WANDERING,  
WITH NO END IN SIGHT.**

**YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO SHUFFLE ALONG IN THE DESERT,  
WITH YOUR FEET SINKING IN THE SANDS THAT THREATEN TO  
SWALLOW YOU, WHERE THE SCORCHING HEAT OF LIFE SAPS YOU OF  
ENERGY & MAKES YOU THIRST FOR THE LIVING WATER TO SOOTHE  
YOUR PARCHED SOUL.**

**FIRST, IT WAS THE PROPHET ISAIAH WHO OFFERED HOPE.**

**NOW IT'S MARK.**

**IN BOTH THE BAPTISM & THE DEATH OF JESUS, HE GIVES YOU THE ASSURANCE THAT YOU WON'T GO THROUGH THAT WILDERNESS ALONE.**

**YOU WON'T CROSS THE DESERT ON YOUR OWN.**

**WHEN YOUR WORLD IS TORN APART & WHEN IT FEELS LIKE EVERYTHING IS CAVING IN AROUND YOU, IT'S THEN – IN THOSE MOMENTS OF HOPELESSNESS & DESPAIR - THAT GOD IS MOST CLEARLY IN YOUR VERY MIDST.**

**HOWEVER, AN UNDERSTANDING & ACCEPTANCE OF THAT ASSURANCE DOESN'T HAPPEN IN AN INSTANT FOR MOST OF US.**

**IT TAKES PLACE OVER TIME.**

**WE GROW INTO IT.**

**IT EVOLVES WITHIN US.**

**THAT'S WHERE SO MUCH OF THIS COMES TOGETHER.**

**THAT IS, PERHAPS, WHAT WE MEAN BY “NEW YEAR'S EVOLUTIONS.”**

**IT'S TRUE IN BAPTISM & IT'S TRUE IN ORDINATION AS WELL.**

**WHETHER ONE IS BAPTIZED AS AN INFANT OR AS AN ADULT, THE REAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THAT EVENT EVOLVES WITHIN US.**

**FOR MOST OF US, WE GRADUALLY GROW IN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE ACCEPTED AS A CHILD OF GOD.**

**SO, TOO, WITH ORDINATION.**

**ON THE DAY ONE IS ORDAINED AS AN ELDER OR DEACON, DON'T EXPECT THAT YOU'LL SUDDENLY KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A SERVANT LEADER.**

**DON'T ANTICIPATE THAT YOU'LL INSTANTANEOUSLY FEEL GOD'S PRESENCE MOVING IN YOUR LIFE MORE POWERFULLY THAN YOU'VE EVER FELT IT BEFORE.**

**THAT MAY HAPPEN – BUT DON'T BE DISAPPOINTED IF IT DOESN'T.**

**FOR MOST PEOPLE, IT HAPPENS GRADUALLY.**

**YOU EVOLVE INTO THE LEADER & SERVANT GOD IS CALLING YOU TO BE.**

**AND, OF COURSE, YOU DON'T DO IT ALONE.**

**YOU DO IT WITH THE LOVE, SUPPORT, PRAYERS & ENCOURAGEMENT OF SO MANY OTHERS WHO STAND WITH YOU IN YOUR EFFORTS.**

**AND THAT BRINGS US FULL CIRCLE TO THOSE TIMES WHEN WE FEEL AS THOUGH EVERYTHING IN LIFE HAS BEEN TORN APART.**

**WE GROW – SLOWLY – INTO AN UNDERSTANDING THAT IN *THOSE* TIMES WE AREN'T ALONE EITHER.**

**IT'S THEN – MORE THAN ANY OTHER TIME – THAT WE CAN COUNT ON – NOT ONLY THE PRESENCE OF GOD – BUT THE LOVE, SUPPORT, PRAYERS & ENCOURAGEMENT OF OUR BROTHERS & SISTERS IN FAITH.**

**FOR THE PAST TWO WEEKS, WE'VE TALKED ABOUT NEW YEAR'S REVOLUTIONS & NEW YEAR'S EVOLUTIONS.**

**LET'S GO BACK TO THE TRADITIONAL NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS.**

**LET'S RESOLVE IN THE COMING YEAR TO BE THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS – ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY FEEL THEIR LIFE IS BEING TORN APART.**



**LET'S RESOLVE TO STAND IN THEIR MIDST – OFFERING LOVE,  
SUPPORT, PRAYERS & ENCOURAGEMENT.**

**THAT, IN ITSELF, WILL MAKE THIS A YEAR FILLED  
WITH HOPE & FULFILLMENT FOR US ALL. AMEN.**

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