

January 21, 2018 After Me....Pt. 2 Mark 1:9-13

The American Presbyterian minister, John Ortberg describes it this way. He writes in his book "Who Is This Man?" ...a book describing the affect of Jesus life, death and resurrection, on the values of mankind, "At roughly the age of 30 years, Jesus decided to make a career change. The carpenter/ builder suddenly becomes a rabbi." This is how Mark describes it. Jesus leaves Nazareth in Galilee, goes to the Jordan River in Judea, and is baptized by John the Baptist.

The accounts of Mark the teenager and Luke the writer of documented history, simply tell us the event occurred. Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan at Judea. Matthew and John's accounts give us a little more detail. It is in the disciple John's account that John the Baptist is said to have explained as Jesus approached him, "Look, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me, has surpassed me, because he was before me...the reason I came baptizing is that he might be revealed to Israel.'"

In Matthew's account there is another thread. Jesus approaches John the Baptist to be baptized. Jesus has chosen to seek out John, and clearly anticipates that John, his cousin will do the job. Jesus joins a line and patiently waits his turn. When John the Baptist sees Jesus he objects. He objects on the basis of "No, no, no! I need to be baptized by you and do you come to me?" Jesus softly and submissively replies. "Let it be so now. It is proper. This is the right thing to do" a reference to John as the forerunner. And then John consented. The sign of the dove and the voice from heaven make it plain the right thing has been done. Jesus is the Son. He is the beloved of the Father. God is pleased.

If anyone asks me where these additional details come from, I am always going to respond that I believe Mary, Jesus mother is the source. John takes care of her after the crucifixion and she becomes a member of his household. The eleven all have access to her. I believe they asked, and I believe she shared her memories. Jesus is suddenly on a new career path, following the leading of the Holy Spirit and his convictions about HIS destiny. What Mark tells us is that it was precisely as Jesus was coming up from under the water that heaven was ripped open. Mark does not say it was like the dove was a sign of the Spirit, he proclaims the Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of the dover and a voice from heaven spoke. Both make clear that the one who comes after John the Baptist, the Messiah, is Jesus. In terms of the trinitarian formula...the Father and the Holy Spirit have publicly endorsed that Jesus is the Son of God.

And there is more. Jesus did not begin by healing or doing a miracle. He did not begin by teaching a profound lesson. The Spirit of God sends HIM out into the deserts of Judea. Jesus spends 40 days there. HE is tempted by Satan there. He is not alone. In the desert Jesus is with the wild animals. He is attended to by the angels of God.

There are three things that we can easily skip by in the last verses attached to the story of John the Baptist's baptizing Jesus and introducing HIM to the Israel of his time. The first is that Jesus was sent into the wilderness for a period of 40 days. It is tempting to us to think of Jesus as going off and being in that dry and arid wild country of rock and sand all by HIMSELF, alone. In fact what Mark tells us, is that a lot was happening in the desert of Judea. And he makes no claim that Jesus has sought isolation, to be alone with HIS thoughts. To be sure Jesus has not taken friends in the human sense of that term with HIM. This is a time for HIM to be with God, and it is time for trial simply because it is a time for HIM to be with God.

40 days is a long time. But surely, if the Spirit of God led Jesus here, HE is assured of the Spirit's holy company. There are moments when things become clear to Jesus in this undistracted and undistracting place. Conviction about the decisions he has made become rooted. Convictions about choices HE is going to have to make firm and become rock solid. He who would say, "Do not be afraid," is not afraid to be in this unworldly but terrifying wilderness.

When I was a teenager, I loved the Fall of the year. I loved to hunt and there was an eagerness with which I would launch a walk by myself down a clearly defined trail into the bush. More than once, I would be seized by a sense of terror in the woods, and run back to the road. And then try to act cool as though nothing were wrong. There is no sense of that kind of experience in the verses we have before us. Jesus goes where HE is led. And HE is not afraid to be there.

Wild animals were with HIM. Again, my experience in the woods was indeed linked to a fear of wild animals. I did not want to meet a bear. I did not want to see wolves. Shadows had the power to startle me. My imagination was in many ways far worse than reality. The sense of what Mark is telling us almost is that the lions lay down with the lamb. There is an insinuation of peace that is part of this description that simply reminds us...the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world is in the wilderness and nothing can go wrong.

But it is in the wilderness that Satan comes to Jesus and tempts HIM. That gives me goosebumps. In other words, I would like to pass on that experience. I have been in the presence of evil. I have rebuked evil. But stopping to think about the reality in the wilderness....no thank you!! What we do know from the accounts of HIS temptation is that Jesus depended on the reliability of the Scriptures to give HIM answer in every tempting experience. That is the one reason we in our time are so Scripture reliant. In this reality we imitate Jesus our Lord, Saviour and Friend.

In the 3rd place we are simply told as a matter of fact, the angels attended HIM. Jesus needs are met by the attending messengers of God, however else one would describe them in picture or print. In the wilderness, in the presence of caring angels, Jesus prepares for everything ahead, and develops an even greater measure of dependence on HIS Father for every circumstance.

Do not mistake my boldness or my assurance. There are questions we might ask for which there is no clear answer. We do not know everything there is to know about Jesus beginning HIS Messianic ministry. Much of what we have here in Mark, in Matthew and Luke and John about these circumstances is shrouded in mystery, the mystery of God, which we will try and try and try to understand and often have to admit we fail. The collision of faith and reason is real. Especially for us. And especially for the church in our time which cannot push the replay button and see with perfect clarity what happened and how and where and when in the time of Jesus. What I am getting at is we will always have to be willing to depend on the Biblical accounts. On reasonable modern explanations of ancient words. And part of the guiding light is to remember faithful people like us have engaged in that struggle for the balance of 2000 years. Which is why a guy like me asks the question "how has the church interpreted this passage in times past? And especially in the times, close to the time of Jesus.

Some things are clear. John the Baptist was real. Jesus was real. John left the Qumran community to announce the imminent arrival of the Messiah. He was not surprised it was Jesus. He held Jesus in high regard. He wanted Jesus to baptize him. Jesus said, "No. You are the Baptist who uses water. You know what I must do." And John the Baptist said, "right!" And God's Spirit led both of them where they were destined to go.

Let us pray;

God our Father, who anoints faith in us in surprising measure, lead us and guide us in our time. Grant that our testimony might be true to the teaching of the Old Book, and all its parts. Let your light so shine on us, that Jesus might be revealed in the midst of these times in this world. Meet the needs of your Church, that might overcome its tempters and teach the truth. In Jesus name we pray. Amen