

Mark 1 – The baptism of Jesus

“John appeared.” Quite the introduction. Did he appear out of nowhere? In Mark’s Gospel, pretty much, or at the most, he appeared “out of prophecy.” And he is there standing in the wilderness, surrounded by people, and he is telling people what they don’t want to hear, and pointing to a man who is better than him. How’s that for the mission of the Church, to tell people what they don’t want to hear: law, and pointing to someone better than themselves (Jesus): Gospel.

John, who that better man, Jesus, will say is the “greatest among men,” after he gets his head chopped off for preaching about marriage – something someone didn’t want to hear, John, the greatest among men, says he is not worthy to untie the Messiah’s sandals. The dirtiest part of Jesus is far too holy for the greatest man to draw near.

And how true. God’s foolishness is greater than our wisdom. Even the angels, the seraphim, in the throne room hide their eyes with two of their wings from the majesty of the Divine Presence because they dare not look upon a Holy God. And with two wings they hide their “dirty” feet, and with two they fly. Isaiah 6.

That’s the seraphim! Who shake the temple of God as they speak, who fill the place with smoke. Who don’t sin. They dare not look at, they dare not reveal their feet to God. So how could we ever dream of untying the Lord’s sandals. How

could we ever present ourselves well enough to touch him, to even be in his presence! No way. No way. No way. We don't have the mechanism to get to his throne room, it isn't hiding off behind mars somewhere, and even if we did have the mechanism to get to his throne room, we certainly wouldn't have the right to stand in it.

We can't stand where he stands. We can't stand where he stands. But the beauty of the Gospel is that, he knows that, and so what does he do? He comes and stands where we do. And so he shows up in, not in an earthly throne room, as if that is anything to him, but in the wilderness in the muddy waters of the Jordan. And he stands in that line of sinners. That he might do what they cannot, fulfill repentance. That he might lift the weight of the law off their shoulders, fulfilling all righteousness, and in so doing make perfectly clear that He is worthy of the throne room of the Father. And yet he will not go to that throne room, not yet, he will first go to a cross. Dirty, evil, and torturous. He goes there first, that our sin might be washed away in his blood, and that we might receive his righteousness which is pure enough and good enough to be in the throne room of God.

What does that mean for you now? Well it means that to stand with Jesus, in this side of his throne room, is not to stand perfectly, nor to stand better than another, to stand with Jesus for us now, is to stand repentant. It's to hop in line with the people at the Jordan. It is to confess that there is a Messiah and I am not worthy of him, or

his sandals. It is to stand before another sinner and confess your sins, to your spouse, here at Church, wherever, even as Jesus stood with the people going to John a sinner, to confess their sins. Jesus stands with you in that line. To stand with Jesus is to confess that you are knee deep in muddy waters of muck, and brokenness, and failure, Jesus stands in those waters too, pure as he is. Because he loves you, he longs to be with you.

It's time, in epiphany to let the light shine and illumine who we are. Truly. And so we see in the muddy waters of the Jordan who we are, sinners, but the epiphany light also illumines who He is. The pure one who will come to sinners to make them worthy of the throne room of God by his work and righteousness. Not ours, his.

Further evidence of this is found in Matthew's Gospel as the scribes and pharisees come to see John. DO they get in line with the sinners? No they stand on the banks, and so Jesus doesn't stand with them and their pride, but in the line of confessors, in the line of the repentant. Where are you standing?

The pharisees thought their righteousness was enough for the throne room of God. Jesus doesn't stand with them, and indeed he says (Matthew 5:20) your "righteousness must exceed that of the pharisees" if you want to stand before God! Theirs isn't good enough. Ours isn't good enough.

So may we leave our “righteousness” and therefore our pride on the shore, and step into the muddy waters of confession and let Jesus lift our burdens and cleanse us as he has promised and acted already to do. Why cling to that dirty garment of our works that he wants to take from you. Let it go! Will you feel less like yourself? Will it hurt to be so exposed to shame and ugliness? Yes, but then take on the robe of righteousness he offers that covers your shame. For he was stripped and nailed to a cross to public shame, if he is not too good for that, and undeservedly so, why are we too good to confess our darkness? To be put to shame? That we might look to him for mercy and find a covering for shame, and One who is strong enough to raise us up even as he is risen!

It's time to cast off the pride and look with sober judgment on what we deserve, on what little scope we have. It's time to remember the waters of baptism we have been brought through that say you will die, no, as Paul says, you have died already. His death, your death, your sins, gone. Let them go. And take up his promises. That His fulfillment of righteousness is credited to you no matter how hard you are struggling right now. No matter how much you have failed, for his name is upon you. The voice said “This is my beloved Son” and that Son died so that the Father would, and does, say the same about you: You are beloved sons and daughters.

Yes, you are beloved, so much so that in Jesus the Holy God come down. He will be the Savior just as he promised, and you will be, and are in baptism and faith, a

beneficiary of his cross and empty tomb. We don't deserve to stand with Him, so he out of love comes to stand with the sinners at the Jordan, and in His promised washing he came to you in a very real way, and still does, even as he promises he is here right now where two or more are gathered and in the bread and wine. He still comes to his people just like he did at the Jordan! We are no second rate because we weren't there, not at all! Such is his continued love for us sinners. So let's leave our pride and our righteousness behind, let's come to the waters and the altar as he bids, and, then maybe we can leave here strengthened, valued, forgiving, and trusting that he won't abandon us out there either. His hands are so sure. Until, in his time, those strong hands bring us to his throne room. That will be a bit scary, I think. But what will he do for his child with his name upon them? What will he do with the one his son died for and came to? He will say, "Ah, this is my beloved daughter, my beloved son. Enter into the joy of your master." God be praised. Amen.