

Who Needs Jesus, Anyway? (Mark says WE do.)

Reconnect – December 13, 2009

Text: Mark 1:1-11; Hebrews 4:14-16

Key Thought: We need Jesus to show us how to make a difference in people's lives.

This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. It began just as the prophet Isaiah had written: "Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way. He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the LORD's coming! Clear the road for him!'" This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had turned from their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. His clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey. John announced: "Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not even worthy to stoop down like a slave and untie the straps of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!" One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy." Mark 1:1-11, NLT

Intro: "Reliant" (discussion)

Q: What does it mean to be "reliant"?

Q: Who are you reliant on? Who are we ALL reliant on?

Q: What does it take to truly be "reliant"? (Trust? Discipline? Humility?)

- Reliant is not normally a word associated with strength – it's more about the opposite – a weakness word, a word that connotes dependency
- You wouldn't associate reliant with successful – but on the other hand, you might very well associate success with being SELF-reliant
- The "self-made man or woman" – the person who has overcome all sorts of obstacles to achieve greatness or dominance or superiority
- In our hunger for heroes, we embrace how the media creates them and the mythology around them – while we minimize or even ignore those that may have helped them get there
 - We see the actress, but not the persistent and annoying agent who knocked on 1000 doors to get them their big shot
 - We see the sports star, but not the parent who drove to 15 years of early morning practices
 - We see the inventor, but not the professor that mentored them and fuelled their hunger for discovery – and so it goes

Jesus, the one who changes everything:

- In any list of the greatest people of history, the most influential people, the ones who have had the most impact – even above the person who invented TV, well, you find Jesus at number one
- Even if people can't agree on who He was, what He really did or why He mattered – He's still there
- Jesus – comes on the scene as an adult fighting evil, with conflict all around him – from weather to religious people to the forces of hell to the unbelief of the people he grew up with in his hometown –
- But in spite of everything, he makes a difference – he starts a movement that will change the world
- But HOW does he do it? Mark's biography of Jesus tells us, by dropping hints right from the very beginning - getting down to business – he doesn't talk about Jesus' birth – no shepherds or wise men or angels – who Jesus is, the impact he's going to make on the world, and how he's going to do it

Read Text: Mark 1:1-11 (go through it)

This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. It began just as the prophet Isaiah had written:

**“Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
and he will prepare your way.**

He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,

‘Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming!

Clear the road for him!’”

- Mark jumps right in – this is what it is: good news, all about Jesus, the chosen one, sent from God, with a unique relationship with God Himself
- And he’s coming, but not quite yet: first, God is sending someone else – a messenger, to prepare the way, to get everything ready
- Traditionally in ancient times, if a king was going to come, the road would be cleared – or constructed, to be straight and level – because a king didn’t go over bumps... !

This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had turned from their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. His clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey.

- That voice shouting in the wilderness is a man named John, who we most often call John the Baptist
- And he’s literally in the wilderness – we know from other accounts of Jesus’ life that John was born to elderly parents, with his father being a priest at the highest level
- But somewhere along the way, whether it was when his parents passed away, or as a teenager, John left that life and headed out into the countryside, and embraced a more radical lifestyle, as someone who saw themselves as a prophet, sent from God
- Not only is John dressed funny, but his hair has never been cut, due to instructions that his parents had received when angels had given them the news that John was on the way – he’s definitely a wild man
- John has started a movement, in spite of himself, being a nonconformist, post-premodern kind of guy
- He’s taken on a religion that has grown empty, that has stopped helping people find their way to God – he’s stepped in to the gap and started to do that himself, by preaching a no-compromise message, calling a spade a spade
- John’s not the first guy to head out into the wilderness and try to start a people movement – but it DOES seem he’s the first to say that EVERYONE needs to get right with God – because normally, a person of that place and time would have figured that they were God’s chosen – that there wasn’t anything wrong with them that would require “baptism” – a religious ritual where the person would be immersed in water to signify a fresh, clean start, forgiven, free of the sin and wrongs that had been on them previously

John announced: “Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to stoop down like a slave and untie the straps of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!”

- But he’s clear all the way through that this is not about HIM – it’s about someone ELSE, someone who is coming – which makes John, in the middle of all his popularity and influence, a very remarkable and rare person – he is ready to give it all up for them
- John is making the appetizers, setting the table, ensuring everything is ready – and not even HE can really know what the meal is going to be like
- He’s getting people ready for God to move in – they’re turning from their old ways, finding forgiveness of the wrongs they’ve done – but on it’s own, that’s not enough – that’s the foundation, not the house you want to build to live in
- The one who is coming, the one that John is “preparing the way for” – will be so much greater than John that it will be like comparing a slave of the time to a master – night and day different would be something we would better understand today – or the Leafs and the Canadiens, maybe
- Keep that last sentence in mind for a couple of minutes: “I baptize you with water, but he [meaning Jesus,] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!”

One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.”

- And so in the middle of the crowds, and the scoffers, and the faithful, and the changed, one day comes a smalltown contractor – Jesus, the son of Joseph, and a cousin of John’s
- It’s likely been years since they’ve seen each other – and you might be wondering why Jesus is getting baptized, being that “clean people don’t need a bath” – but more about that shortly
- Mark tells us that as Jesus is coming up out of the water, he sees a vision – it’s not clear that anyone else sees it, just him – the “heavens” ripped open and the Spirit of God fluttering down on to him
- And there’s a voice – again, we’re not sure if others hear it or not, but we know from a different biography of Jesus that John the Baptist hears it – God’s voice, saying how proud He is of His Son and how happy He makes him (I love that about this – the intimacy between God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit here)

Jesus the reliant one, according to Mark:

- How is Jesus going to change the world? By relying on God and helping others to do the same – immersed in the presence of God and offering the same to other people (“baptize with the Holy Spirit”)
- John has set the stage and prepared the way – and from here on in, Jesus is making a difference everywhere he goes – righting wrongs, fighting evil and injustice, loving the unlovable, provoking controversy, and ultimately, dying for a greater good
- But everything he does is going to be empowered by God and done through a deep, transforming relationship with God – by being immersed in God, all the time

Immersed in God? How does THAT happen?

- Having a close relationship with God – that kind of love, acceptance, trust – that’s attractive – that’s something people have always wanted but weren’t sure they could ever really have
- How do you and I get there? Well, we’re never going to be perfect in it – but it starts with spending “meaningful time” with God
 - We spend time with all kinds of people in all different contexts – you spend time with people on the bus, even though you don’t know them, you’re there beside them
 - You spend time with people at work, but you may not know them very well at all
- It’s not just time with – because if it was, we’d be all set – after all, God is everywhere, all-seeing, all-present
- He knows US through and through, but without “meaningful time” we don’t know HIM
 - Prayer
 - Bible reading
 - 5 minute challenge?
 - Blog in the new year? (Through the Bri-ble?)
- It’s not complicated – it’s just challenging

Reliance leads to impact (believe it or not):

- It was that reliance on God – that trust, that being so “in sync” with the Father that gave Jesus the ability to make such an impact on people
- **Heritage Minutes** – I know when I see them that I get inspired – I want to do something like that, I’m a little jealous, I’m fired up, and I feel this intense pride to be Canadian (believe it or not!)
- But each of those people profiled, heroic and inspiring as they were, didn’t exist in isolation – they were helped along the way and shaped by those around them
- And in the same way, if we’re going to make maximum impact, we’re going to need help
- One of the books I read when I was recently off work recovering from surgery was Outliers, by Malcolm Gladwell – one of my favourite authors, who wrote The Tipping Point, Blink and some other stuff
 - His central thought in the book is that it doesn’t matter how smart you are – or JUST matter how smart you are, in terms of being successful and changing the world – there are so many more factors – opportunity, geography, the people around you, even a little bit of luck – so many factors have to fall in place – including hard work and willingness to “put the time in” (10000 hours – more than 14 months) on a particular activity or pastime
- And as I was thinking about that this week, I thought that living for God is the same way – we need each other to be most effective – that’s why Jesus invents the Church just before heading back to heaven

But reliance is HARD!

- Reliance – **Cade’s adoption** – complete reliance on us, shockingly so – he has no-one else
- We find it hard enough (at least, I do) to rely on anyone else for anything REALLY important – I’m not the trusting type when it comes to my own self-interest – I hedge my bets instead for the most part – but to not have a choice in the matter – to have to trust someone with something really important – THAT’S hard – and that’s again why we need God’s help to get it right

Key Thought:

We need Jesus to show us how to make a difference in people’s lives.

This High Priest of ours [Jesus] understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most. (Hebrews 4:15-16, NLT)

Conclusion: *Invictus*

- There’s a movie just out called *Invictus* – it’s the story of how Nelson Mandela, just elected leader of South Africa, at the end of apartheid, challenged the South African national rugby team, the Springboks, to unite in the face of racism and division – and they won the rugby world cup in 1995
- The movie is named after a poem that Mandela had kept in his prison cell, for inspiration, for the years that he had been imprisoned by the South African government
- And as you read the different reviews of the film, you often see the poem quoted as well:

Invictus (“Unconquered”) – William Ernest Henley (19th century poet)

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

- It’s a great poem – strongly romantic, in the sense of the ideal that stirs our hearts – you read a poem like this, and you think “YES – I CAN do this, I CAN overcome, I can do anything I have to do, I can succeed”
- And yet, even if it tugs at our heartstrings, it’s not exactly accurate – in its portrayal of us as people, or even of the portrayal of God

- After all, He gets an indirect mention at the end of the poem – the “Horror of the shade” is death, the “strait gate” is the way to heaven, and the scroll is the final judgment that each person will face
- The writer doesn’t care about any of this – life is in the here and now, and he’s not worried about the life or lack of it that will come after his death
- Need to take personal responsibility more? This is the poem for you
- BUT – want to know how to make a difference in this world? How to leave a lasting legacy? You won’t find it here – because God is not our adversary, He wants to be our sponsor – our advocate – the One who empowers us, who carries us on His shoulders and helps us change the world for the better
- **Where are you at? What’s the next step for you?**
 - Repentance? A change in your life? “Clearing the way?”
 - Baptism? (water)
 - Immersion in God’s Spirit? More time with Him? More reliance on Him? More trust?
 - More impact? Better use of the empowerment of God?
- **And what’s your circle of impact, anyway? Who are you living your life for?**
 - Yourself?
 - Your family?
 - Your friends? Coworkers? Neighbours?
 - What about people you’ve never met?
 - (How could a person make an impact on people they’ve never met?)

Response: Your Love Is a Song (Switchfoot)

Response: Q & A