



Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Baptism of Our Lord

January 7, 2018

Mission Forward Begins at the Font

Mark 1:4-11

It was a brand new kind of writing, the "gospel," literally, "good news." The first one ever, written by John Mark, mentored by Simon Peter, is called "The Gospel of Mark." [11,304 words] Most of the Gospel readings in this new liturgical year will be from that writing.

It begins very simply---"Beginning/norm of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God." No doubt that it means to be the story of something really BIG! It is a story of God!

The work was meant to be read, to be heard by a people who know that Jesus died, was raised, and ascended to be with God. Those who hear are those who are living around 66 -73 AD/CE. And they are likely a network of faithful Christian communities trying to remain faithfully rooted in Gospel in time of upheaval and change.

(The times were characterized by the destruction of the temple, the threat of persecution, and varied interpretations of Jesus.)

Mark begins with a quote from Isaiah...Literally, "What you are about to hear/read comes from the Prophet of old, 'Wake UP, I am sending a messenger who will prepare your WAY. Crying from the wilderness, a voice 'Prepare the WAY of the Lord, make his WAY straight.'"

Let me teach you a Greek word, ready, "hodos." Say, "hodos," HODOS! The word appears sixteen times in Mark and is a way finder for the Church to know that what begins in Galilee will take us to a hill of crucifixion in Jerusalem. And this whole story is about a new creation. RENEWAL every moment of every day that God gives life.

In our Gospel portion heaven and earth meet. The cues are potent: wilderness, place of new beginnings; message, pointing to the Holy Spirit, a baptism with sorrow for past pathways and the assurance of the FORGIVENESS OF SINS. And the crowds must have been phenomenal (Imagine: All the people of the Puget Sound! Imagine the traffic!)

And the One who appears is Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee, into the water, John baptizes. He came up out of the water, saw the heavens torn open, Spirit descending (like a dove), heard a voice from heaven:

**"YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON;
IN YOU I HAVE TAKEN GREAT DELIGHT."**

The point is that the first gospel means to be a uniting of God and humankind in Jesus at the point of our most urgent need---a brand new start, a new creation, a creation not unlike the one recorded "In the beginnings when God created the heavens and the earth." What we share is a really BIG DEAL!

Jesus' mission begins and, after being tested, this Spirit-possessed Son of God preaches a life starting gospel message "The time is NOW, here comes God's kingdom, repent, and believe the gospel." And it is to this that we are called in our time, out of the font, through the Table and into the world.

In this new time we are about the work of MISSION FORWARD. Over the past years our mission has been and is secure. You know the words that bond us: GATHER, ENCOURAGE, EQUIP, SEND. Those are the word cues for all that we do in our shared ministry.

Out of our Mission Statement, 2017 was a year of faithful response and I believe that is the fruit of the clarity of who and whose we are through local and global mission.

2018 builds on a legacy of over 60 years here in this place. We are growing, glowing, and finding ever deeper ways to be discipleFIT. Not waning in mission, or confusion about our direction, but clear that even in times of change we are guided and kept by the same Holy Spirit that empowered the Lord of our lives.

And it comes back to here, our Jordan, {H₂O+the Word of God} our birthing place into the family of God, the Body of Christ.

So, on this first Lord's Day of 2018,

1. What is Holy Baptism? (bulletin) Page 4 --- Let's read it..."Baptism is not water only, but it is water used together with God's Word and by God's command."

We renounce all and every force of evil and are in the place where we are born anew...Spirit born as the old us dies in Christ and is raised to new life under the Sign of the Cross. Remember? In the name...Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our brand of new life!

Luther had it...here is the gift---sins (ALL OF THEM!) forgiven, delivered from death and the devil/deceiver, everlasting salvation and life forever.

We are grounded, tethered, kept, and guided in all that we will ever do; Spirit led, the Spirit of grace, love, Christ, life...given everything we can ever need for life---price paid. But, wait,

2. What does this mean?" See! Here is the intersection on the pathways to renewal. Either we take the junction to fear and doubt, anxiety and wonderment. Or, the hodos/WAY, where we learn to listen, learn, dream and walk into new days with creativity and renewal as the key! The old is not weak and weary, but the seeds sown for the new days of life together.

Luther taught that in that water-washing we rise to be a part of what we confess to be "the holy universal/catholic Church and the "communio sanctorum" --- "the communion of saints." We are all in for Jesus and with one another!

Mission Forward is NOT looking back, but, in the time being, in this present age to be...

3. Walking Wet under the Sign of the Cross.

And here is where God calls us to step up. Jesus calls us to "Follow" and to trust the Holy Spirit. That can be scary. We like to be in control, work the plan, to know exactly what is ahead of us and how it will impact us. To be clear, that alone is not about the work of the Holy Spirit!

Imagine the Christmas story. Mary and Joseph did not have the handbook, the social media, the support group for therapeutic aversion; they had each other and the Holy Spirit.

It is so for us today---and here are a few points of reference for mission forward, walking wet witness to Jesus.

✠ +++Under the power of the Holy Spirit guided by our Mission Statement and Core Values we are a centered and growing congregation: our membership is active in mission, our leadership teams (Council, Committees, Discipleship Ministries, music and servant groups include over 330 participants), there are more Baptisms than most congregations have in five years. And check our Time for Little Disciples with often more babies in arms than walked to the font!

(Our 2016 ELCA Report showed a Baptized membership of 1413, 1155 active confirmed and our Roster of Members includes a demographic split with 893 members between the ages of 1 and 60) / average worship attendance hovers around 281 per Sunday.

We are a younger-ing parish within our Synod.

✠ +++Local and Global outreach which is more engaged than at any time in our life together: housing, hunger, education...our Christmas outreach included over 8 options each of which were oversubscribe with servant outreach from our local food banks/HopeLink) to MaaSAE Girls' School uniforms.

Here for me, is the key outcome: Hundreds of us sharing but none of us taking individual credit as everything was given in the name of Saint Andrew's because of Jesus and His love.

✠ +++Project Bihar --- Lutheran World Relief. In the same we have supported and shared mission in Madagascar, Ethiopia, and Tanzania, we collaborating with 9 congregations, two in Washington State in reaching out to Northeast India. With a core group of 14 serving as our congregation's support team. And the valued added is the Erling/Prasad family just returning from six weeks in that region in the city that Asha is from. Stay tuned to where the Spirit is leading and take a bookmark today.

There are many who would say that the Christians are losing their "market share" in our times. I am confident that Jesus gives us the base to build deeply into our culture with the good news of a community of care that shares the dynamic of the Holy Spirit guiding us forward in mission and witness one step at a time.

How is your life on the hodos, the way of the Lord? I call on you to renewal on the Faith journey: Word, Sacrament, fellowship, and service. Each one has a part, a place, a gift to share that all might know and celebrate the power of forgiveness, love as the base and bond, peace between all, joy abounding, and hope undiminished in every time and place.

Beloved in Christ! Today is the day that the Lord has given us. Let us rejoice and be glad that we are a part of the place and plan for ever.

In the name of...in the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit who breathes new life into us each day, Amen.