

For This: He Came to Show the Way Mark 1:9-15

Introduction

Every season brings with it a cluster of classic movies that are replayed each year and often show multiple times, even multiple times in a day. You have to watch them at least once. It's a tradition. Even though you know the plot by heart, you are compelled to watch them. Movies like ...

- Christmas:
 - *It's a Wonderful Life* (with Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed)
 - *A Christmas Story* (with the leg lamp and a Red Rider BB gun)
- Easter:
 - *Ben Hur* (with Charlton Heston and that breath-taking chariot race)
 - *The Robe* (with Richard Burton and Jean Simmons)
- And last but not least, every February 2nd you after you get the six week weather forecast from Puxatawny Phil, you just have to watch:
 - *Groundhog Day* (with Bill Murray and Andi McDowell)

In a slight and offbeat way, today feels like Groundhog Day to me. Six weeks ago I preached the final sermon of our Advent series "Behold." As you may recall the goal of that series was to tell the story of Jesus, so I extended the series beyond Christmas so that I could cover three other events:

1. The day Jesus was dedicated by his parents in the Temple
2. The arrival of the Magi on Epiphany
3. And, six weeks ago, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River

So here we are today with our Gospel text before us, right back at the baptism of Jesus. The same event that was the subject of my sermon six weeks ago. Sort of a lectionary version of Groundhog's day.

That was the last Sunday of our Advent celebration. Today is the first Sunday day of our Lenten celebration. Then we marveled with the word "Behold!" Today we focus on the phrase "For This." Jesus came for this.

Standing before Pontius Pilate on the day of His trial – on what would be the last day of His life – Jesus declared that He had come to fulfill a purpose.

For this purpose I have been born, and for this I have come into the world...
(John 18:37)

So at the start of our Lenten journey we are brought back to the waters of the Jordan River in order that we might see that:

Jesus came to show us the way.

This way would be marked by three characteristics. It would be ...

CHARACTERISTIC #1: A WAY MARKED BY BLESSING (vv. 9-11)

Our text begins with a familiar story. Or at least I hope it is familiar since you heard me preach about it just six weeks ago. It is a story that essentially launches the ministry portion of Jesus' time on earth.

Jesus comes to the Jordan River where His cousin John is officiating at baptismal services for all who would heed his call for them to repent of their sins. Even though there was absolutely no reason for Jesus to respond to John's altar call, Jesus stepped out of the crowd and into the water.

Mark's gospel doesn't record John's initial resistance to the request of Jesus. It just tells us the deed was done.

At that time Jesus ... was baptized by John in the Jordan. (Mark 1:9)

It also includes the pronouncement of the voice of the Father from heaven as Jesus came up out of the water.

You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased. (Mark 1:11)

One of the many nuances of what I believe about the moment of baptism is that in that moment God begins to pour out His amazing blessings on the one who was baptized. The relationship that is forged in that moment results in a lifetime of God's amazing touch on that life, even when that life has for some reason drifted away from the kind of life God desires. God continues to bless, constantly calling that person back to a life of faith.

And the one who walks with Jesus most assuredly walks in blessing. All you have to do is read the first 12 verses of Matthew 5 – a section we call the “Beatitudes” – to know that God blesses the one who follows Him.

One of my favorite reminders of this truth is found in the very first Psalm:

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers. (Psalm 1:1-3)

The fascinating thing about blessings for me is that they are often “rear view mirror” events. In the heat of the moment, in the busyness of the day, in the midst of the struggle I often don't realize how God blessed me. I can only see it in the rear view mirror.

Our church staff reflects on that quite a bit these days. In the midst of a pandemic, we continue to see how God has blessed.

Jesus came to show us that His way is a way marked by blessing. You will see that too as you walk with Him.

His way is also ...

CHARACTERISTIC #2: A WAY MET BY STRUGGLE (vv. 12-13)

Immediately after this glorious baptismal event, we read:

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. (Mark 1:12-13)

It's a good reminder that the way of Jesus is also a way of struggle. He faced resistance in His efforts to fulfill the purpose for which He came. And if He did, we most certainly will as well.

You caught, didn't you, that it was the Holy Spirit that led Jesus out to face these temptations? Satan did the tempting, but the same Holy Spirit that descended on Jesus in His baptism now leads into the face of temptation and testing.

With this event, Jesus shows us that in this life it is impossible for us to escape the assault of the devil. We will be tempted and tested. It is only logical. Satan doesn't want us in heaven, and he will do everything in his power to turn us in His direction.

But not all struggles are meant to defeat us. Most of the things we will face are instead meant to strengthen us. And they are permitted by the Holy Spirit so that we will emerge stronger in our faith and in our resolved to walk with Jesus. That's what the writer of James chapter 1 knew when he wrote the words many of you have committed to your memories:

My fellow believers, when it seems as though you are facing nothing but difficulties see it as an invaluable opportunity to experience the greatest joy that you can! For you know that when your faith is tested it stirs up power within you to endure all things. And then as your endurance grows even stronger it will release perfection into every part of your being until there is nothing missing and nothing lacking. (James 1:2-5, TPT)

My teammates and I would groan and complain every time our high school wrestling coach would say things like: "No pain, no gain" or "What does not kill you will only make you stronger."

- His motivation was to make us stronger wrestlers. It had varying degrees of success.
- God's motivation is to make you stronger in your faith.

Just like the muscles in your body, the only way your faith can grow stronger is to meet resistance.

Jesus came to show us the way, a way marked by blessing, a way met by struggle, and a way ...

CHARACTERISTIC #3: A WAY MEASURED BY TRUSTING (vv. 14-15)

Following His baptism and the temptations that followed, Jesus launched his ministry by going through the region proclaiming the good news. He said:

The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!

Believing always has an element of uncertainty.

You have no doubt heard of “Ripley's Believe It or Not!” It is an American franchise, founded by Robert Ripley which deals in bizarre events and items so strange and unusual that readers might question the claims. Every year more than 12 million people attend a Ripley museum to check it out for themselves. One memorable item talks about a hunting dog named Spike who would eat pins, tacks, screws, nails and razor blades. Do you believe it or not?

- By the way, the owner of that dog was a man named Charles Schulz. That's right, the same guy that created the cartoon strip Peanuts. Spike was Snoopy's brother.

You may have a hard time believing everything Mr. Ripley claims to be true. So too in matters of faith. There is always an element of uncertainty about it. There are always questions that can't be answered.

But the kind of believing that God asks of us doesn't require absolute certainty. It just says:

In the midst of my uncertainty, I will trust Your way to be the best way.

I don't how You parted the waters of the Red Sea.

- I don't know how the walls of Jericho came a tumblin' down.
- I don't how the world was created or how it is going to end.
- In fact, Lord, I don't know what most of the Bible means.

But I know enough to know this:

My way doesn't work out all that well.

So I'm going to trust in Your way. Even when I think You are wrong.

APPLICATION

One of the best moments in my life was the day my dad let sit in the front seat and hold the map. I put my finger on our road and followed along every inch of the way.

- Our road is coming up, Dad. It's about a half an inch away.
- OK, son. Let me know when we get there.

That was a great moment because I thought I was showing Dad the way. The truth is, he already knew how to get where we were going. And if he didn't, it was the map that would show the way. No me. I was clueless. If I was going to get there, I had to go with someone who knew the way.

Jesus came to show us the way. In fact He once said to His disciples:

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

Are you following Him today? Is it His map that guides your life?

Amen.