

After the Sermon Hymn: *Stepping down to the congregation:*

Mark 1: 1-11

“New Beginnings”

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God’s peace with you!

Let us read together the sermon text for this week. You find the text in the New Testament Section on page 34. It is Mark, chapter 1. Let us read the verses 1-11.

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; ³ the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” ’,

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate

locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, ‘The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’

The Baptism of Jesus

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’

AMEN

Any spontaneous ideas, what this text could mean for us today? Is there a word, sentence or sequence, which you think is important in this text? ...

This year we will read often from the gospel of Mark. Today we have started with the beginning of his gospel. The gospel of Mark starts like with iron letters: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ”. Indeed: We need to know how the salvation started and how salvation can still come to us.

When we look at a great person’s life, we usually look to the end of this person’s life. When we know the end of a story, we can lean back, all eagerness falls as we know already the end. But in real life

we need to concentrate on the beginning, where nothing is decided, where all risks are still there.

Another wording for “good news” is “gospel” or “testament”. But the Greek word, Mark used, was “eu-angelion”. In the Cesar cult of Jesus time “eu-angelion” was used to describe the Emperor’s birth, his accession to the throne or the proclamation of a victory. Now the good news are identified with Jesus; Jesus doesn’t proclaim only the good news - he IS the good news! This is the reason, why we need the depth psychology: Because within each of us is everything we need to understand. While the historical-critical method reduces everything to only what happened historically, better: what can be PROOFED historically, Mark was seeking the union between the historical Jesus and the Christ we believe in, carrying the truth. Soeren Kierkegaard, the famous Danish philosopher and religious essayist (1813-55) understood Jesus as the keeper of the deepest and absolute humanity. We can apportion Marks Christology with the help of the depth psychology and bare therewith our essential humanity, which we all can experience - when we have the courage to trust.

Isaiah’s words, which we read, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord’ are words of the Advent, words for people who wait, who seek. If we are honest to ourselves then we will be willing to confess that this is our whole life: To hope and to believe, that the essential is still coming. This is the reason, why John the Baptist wants to shake up and wake us up for new longing.

What do we wait for? How do we connect to our bigger, essential I? After centuries John the Baptist ties in with his message with the longing of the old prophets of his Jewish nation. They all wanted to teach their people a new thirst and a new hunger: Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah. These prophets believed deeply that their people had to shoulder a new time of desert, or with other words: That their whole life style was a whole desert, not satisfying the REAL needs.

At the Discovery Museum at Times Square you can marvel in these days the famous Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran. The Essenes, who wrote these scrolls, baptized already like John the Baptist did. But John's repentance baptism exceeds the Essenes-baptism in several aspects. (First) John's baptism is authorized by and tied to John as person. (Second) John's baptism is no self-baptism, but needs to be performed by John or one of his disciples. (Third) The baptism is singular and cannot be repeated. And (fourth): John's baptism means the acceptance into the eschatological-covenantal community and is nothing else then the sacramental sealing of all, who want to escape the near end time.

But there are also differences between John and Jesus. (First) John was an ascetic, Jesus cosmopolitan. (Second) John preached: "The end of the world is near, repent!" Jesus announced the coming of Gods kingdom: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens!" (Third) John remains WITHIN the expectance, Jesus claimed to be its fulfillment. (Fourth) Finally: John belonged to the law, with Jesus starts the gospel, the "eu-angelion", the good news.

But John's baptism symbolized in a wonderful way Jesus' intention: That we need to water the desert we live in with living water. Our modern desert has no sand, but is still a good picture for the silence, which appears in our lives, when we are oversaturated with food, money or materialistic hodgepodge. Nothing is more dangerous for our humanity than all this, what seems to be meanwhile duty for each of us: To get as much as we get! All this "too much" lies like a leaden [laeddn] "cover layer" over our souls. In Germany the last living old people tell the story, how in all the poverty after the Second War people experienced everything, what seemed to be lost already a few decades later: Sister- and brotherhood, understanding, the willingness to build something together.

We humans have a feeling for what is important or not. The old prophets must have had similar experiences, when they dreamed that God might lead his people back into the desert, where Israel was seeking and straying for 40 years, yes, but lived without prevention, picking each morning the manna from the ground, following in the day God appearing in a cloud pillar and in the night appearing in a fire pillar.

What do we need REALLY to live on? When John called: "Get baptized!", he called for a radical new beginning, a re-birth.

When our parents brought us into church for our baptism, it was clear to them, that we were not just their product. They brought us here as a human being, whose forehead touches the sky and whose heart is

so wide as the whole world. They wanted that we could receive our name in HER holy place, so that all HER prophecies and promises, all the visions and dreams of the old prophets would also apply to us. Nobody should be able to darken this pure light of God in our heart and nobody should be able to block the way of life back to the stars. THIS is what our parents hoped for us, when they asked for our baptism at the beginning of OUR life.

But what does John's preaching mean for us, who we are 30, 40, 60 years old? For us means the symbol of baptism that we are invited to abandon a life of illusiveness [illusiwness]. It means: Begin to dream again back along the forgotten paths of your life -- paths, which you maybe stopped going or never went. Have the courage to imagine how your life would look like, if you would start now again. Now matter how old you are. What did you dream as a child for yourself?

Certainly, we can take this offer for phantasm. Certainly, we can decide that it is bothering to think about the lost chances and possibilities in our life. Certainly, we can say that the train we sit in has left and that after 20 stations it would be too late to change - if we know at all where our train is, between Albany and Cleveland, or Cleveland and St. Louis, who knows?

It is a miracle that so many people followed the call of John the Baptist. They must have been fascinated by this vision of a pure, blank new beginning. Only the messenger scared them with his ascetic desert clothing and eating. His message seemed them too

hard, too radical, too absolute. But even we might LIKE this straightforwardness: A penitential sermon, a political short-term tactic is not enough. As long as we only read manifests and rail against the ill we only struggle with the surface. Jesus didn't say: We DO sinful things, Jesus said we ARE sinners! It is not enough to give a ticking-off against alcohol, when we see an alcoholic; we would achieve with our criticism exactly the opposite and the man would probably rinse down his guilt feelings with even more alcohol. No, we will only change, when we can gain the trust that we can live WITH our strains and difficulties. THEN we will become a stronger I, become a stronger person.

This is the difference between John and Jesus. John remains with his penitential sermon in the pathos of the religious agitation. How attractive this still can be in our days we can see in the evangelical mega churches with their clear anti-gay theologies. But this kind of agitation advances only the fear, which is behind all sin.

So why did Jesus accept John's baptism? The young Jesus of Nazareth grew at John like Plato did at Socrates [So-kraties]. The young Jesus was a religious lone wolf, a theological self-made man, who refused in his longing for something new and fresh the traditional religious habits. Jesus was looking for the non-conformist, extraordinary. This way he became attentive to John. This headstrong ascetic and strong preacher about the near the end time influenced the Nazarene outsider quintessentially. This way Jesus was able to grow himself: through discipleship, faith and later also clear cut-off.

John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth and soon also Paul of Tarsus: All three decided against their descent and against the comfortable collaboration. All three felt their gnosis [nosis] as assignment by God – and all three paid for their decision with loneliness, persecution and violent death. When we remember next week Martin Luther King Jr. we will remember another personality with the same consequent and deep faith. BTW: If you have the same courage but don't know what to fight against or for: Simply fight in this country against capitalism and FOR a humanized economy – then you can end up easily with the same amount of enemies like John, Jesus, Paul or Martin...

To John they came, because they were afraid about God and God's judgment - and they wanted to defect themselves from their sins. Jesus didn't believe in this possibility. He wanted to proof that we don't need to be afraid about God, that we can tell God everything and that everything will be good, if we leave everything to God. ...

Our story ends with the powerful picture: That the heavens open and a dove appears out of it. It is the same dove, which appeared already in the flood myth, sent out by Noah to seek, if land and therewith a new world would emerge out of the flood. Back then as in John's baptism, the water became symbol for the cleansing from the sins of us humans ... as the dove became the symbol of the divine peace and mercy. In opening the heavens all barriers disappear and God declares: "You are my beloved daughter, my beloved son!" With these words answers God when we approach God through all our fear with trust. Then happens the most unlikely: Reconciliation between us and our creator. And a new beginning

can happen: Now. AMEN!