

The Really Real – A Reminder

Mark tells us in Sunday's proclamation:

John the Baptist appears in the wilderness and announces God's saving word to a people whose yearning for a prophetic voice had been fed by 400 years of silence. John's clothes and fiery speech identifies him with the prophets of old, but in his message, there is also the promise of something radically new: "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

John was announcing that God's mercy was at hand and on that day at the river Jordan, God was about to tear open the barrier between humanity and God's love once and for all.

Mark tells us that just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, "he saw the heavens torn apart." Now, as popular, soft and fuzzy religious art would have us picture this scene we could envision Heaven as a bright blue sky filled with puffy white clouds gently parting as a white dove dives toward the earth, coming to rest straight over Jesus' head.

But the image Mark paints for us is much more powerful than that. In the Greek the word we translate as "the heavens torn apart" is where we get the word schism. Listen to that..."God made a schism in the heavens. God ripped open the fabric of human history to deliver words that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, fell soft and sweet as a dove into Jesus' ears, "You are my son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased." And Mark will use this word one more time in his gospel and that is at Jesus' death when the curtain of the Temple is torn in two and all that separates us from God as invisible and unknowable is rent asunder forever.

God is not out there, far away and inaccessible. What Jesus sees in his vision is a brief glimpse into a reality that goes beyond the one that the world offers. It's, as one of my favorite theology professors used to say, a glimpse into the really real. We think the world in its brokenness is our true reality. But, in moments like this, we are offered a momentary glimpse of a different reality—a reality that is just as present to us should we decide to reach out and grasp it and hold onto it as the deeper truth of our lives.

A good deal of our lives as Christians is learning to see and live by this different reality even when we can't see it. Sometimes we experience mysterious and wondrous moments in our lives when the curtain is drawn back and we see or hear what is really going on; but most of the time we must walk by faith, not by sight.

In our baptism we are marked as Christ's own forever. We are bound with him to God in a love that transcends the deepest cruelty the world might offer.

On any given day we face the possibility of feeling unloved or abandoned, but, KNOW THIS, know this with everything that you are---You are God's beloved, with you God is well pleased. In the heart of any abandonment, close your eyes, let the noise of the world fall away and listen, listen for that voice soft and gentle as a dove because it is seeking you out and if you will allow your self to hear, you will have no doubt...."You are my child, my Beloved", God will say, "with you I am well pleased." Sunday, as we celebrate Jesus' baptism we are reminded that with God this is the only Truth that is really real.

If you are not yet baptized, do not feel excluded. You too are deeply beloved of God; of this you must have no doubt. Baptism is simply when we or, if we are infants, the community of faith on our behalf, claims our inheritance as children of God. We all share in this inheritance. In the end, it is up to us to claim it and live into it with all we're worth.

When we see the really real we can find our way through any wilderness into which we might stumble and become lost. We follow Jesus. And as Mark tells us, following Jesus will lead us into some pretty dry and dusty places laden with temptation and apparent failure. If we remember that always and at all times we are God's beloved, we will always find our way through any challenge the world has to offer.

And when we know ourselves as God's beloved, when we truly grasp that God in Christ has named us and claimed us as Beloved forever, it will be impossible for us not to recognize each other as the same. It is a gracious God who takes delight and pleasure in who you are and who you are becoming. Believing this changes us. Believing this defines us. This profound gift is what we have to share with the world. Wishing You a Happy and Beloved New Year,
Stephanie+