

***PRAISE INTERNATIONAL***  
***WHERE DO WE START?***  
***MARK 1:1-11 KINGDOM NT***

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**Good Morning**

**Prayer Needs**

Pictures of bombed out and leveled buildings with smoke rising has become a norm as we said goodbye to 2023 and look towards 2024. Its hard to find a news source that does not have some sort of headline reminding us of the horrors being experienced in our world. Attempts to understand the violence can be equally difficult as we hear justifications for bloody retaliatory violence. I more than one instance I have found myself in the uncomfortable position of being challenged for not taking a 'side' but attempting to denounce all expression of violence.

- Beloved to be clear a cease fire is not what is needed and ending of war is what is needed in the Ukraine - in Gaza - in Israel. The longer I study the life of Jesus the more I am convinced that He is not interested in 'justified' violence. Jesus came to close the book on violence.

He comes into a violent world as a baby and even as a baby His presence is seen as a threat that is responded to in violence taking the life's of babies in Bethlehem. And the weeping for the innocent ones has not ended has it? As I was praying this past week on the day of remembering the murder of the innocents - I am challenged how often I have allowed my thinking to be shaped by an image of Justice that looks more like John Wayne than Jesus Christ! We have no end to images of 'Redemptive Violence' portrayed in story form over and over. And yet Jesus takes up a Cross and renounces the Sword. This is the Gospel of Jesus that comes to reveal an image of a world healed not by 'redemptive violence' but by a King who lays down the sword and absorbs the violence of men to redeem mankind. This is the Gospel!

So how do we start the year with images of violence in classrooms, neighborhoods, cities leveled beyond recognition? Blessed are those who mourn... one of the most powerful observations I have heard Denise proclaim is this in the face of sadness and violence. First we grieve - we don't just choose sides and assign blame...but then this is her observation 'our grief has hope'. Blessed are those who mourn they will be comforted. Our comfort is not our weak ideas of justice but in God's justice - listen to how this is worded in the Prayer of the Week from the Common Book of Prayer '*O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored the dignity of human nature; Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled Himself to share our humanity...*'

Interesting that our lectionary text for this Sunday is from the Gospel of Mark chapter 1:1-11 (read Kingdom New Testament). John Mark begins his gospel with this incredible statement '***This is where the good news starts-the good news of Jesus the Messiah, God's son.***'

Now this sounds like a really cool spiritual greeting until you begin to consider the timing of Marks gospel. Most scholars locate Mark in Rome at the time of his writing. Rome is becoming a hellish place for Christians under Nero. Known for his extravagance and tyranny this is the Roman emperor who killed his mother and wife. While not able to be documented he played the fiddle while half of Rome burned. The fire of AD 64 is rumored to be a plot of Nero who saw himself as unstoppable in his desires and devices. The fire which he blamed on Christians - this group of men and women who bowed their knee to another King - the fire led to wholesale persecution of Christians in Rome.

**This was NOT a good time to be a follower of Jewish Messiah named Jesus.** AD 66 Titus has begun

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***Yes, Christ in you bringing with Him the hope of all the glorious things to come.***  
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to forcefully put down the Jewish revolt in Israel that would set out to completely remove Israel from the face of the earth wiping out Jerusalem, burning the temple outlawing the language and renaming the country to Palestine. This is the actual hostile world that John Mark is living in - hostile to his Jewish heritage and his Christian faith. To put it lightly the world is coming apart for these young believers in Rome - nothing was ever going to be the same. It was like Rome had completely lost its mind. Well some say that Nero may have - many Christians believed Nero to be the anti-Christ. He commits suicide at the age of 30 in AD 68 and what follows is what is called the year of 4 emperors until finally Vespasian wages war against what is now a divided Roman empire, enters Italy from Egypt and defeats the sitting emperor Vitellus and is declared emperor of Rome.

Watch this all of the Roman empire celebrates what is called '**good tidings**' every city celebrates '**Good News**' and hosts celebrations of a reunited Roman empire and their Emperor!

- In a world wondering what is next- they look to their political leadership and celebrate good tidings – they proclaim good news.

**Mark begins his gospel with this proclamation;**

**“This is where the good news starts-the good news of Jesus the Messiah, Gods son”**

**In a world asking 'whats next?'- Mark locates the good news not in a political Savior or the hope of personal security ( something most followers of Jesus had no real hope for ). Mark locates the Good News not in empire or emperor but in a the Good News of Jesus Christ the Messiah.**

**Beloved today we locate the Good News of our life, here in a man Jesus Christ the Messiah.**

Mark then goes on to identify the ministry of John the Baptist whose role was to prepare the way for the Messiah.

- Not by creating a bigger or better version of leadership for people promising provision but of the good news of a gospel that has broken into their lives.
- But a God who had come for those who were genuinely asking 'what's next' and did what they could not do for themselves.

**This is not the first time that Gods people had concluded - *nothing will ever be the same.***

- Exodus 14 - Following 400 years of slavery in Egypt in a moment they were free to leave.
- They did not just leave the scripture details that they left in martial array ( they were marching like soldiers) even though they had never seen war.
- Their arms were filled with gold they had not earned - what a picture.
- Then God leads them to camp next to the Red Sea, Mountains on either side only one way out...
- **And Pharaoh and his army have now changed their mind and are coming after them....it seems like a suicide mission at best.**

**And God parts the Red Sea and watch this the Promise of God met the People of God with Hope!**

- Beloved that is the Good news - Gods Promise is always about meeting His people with Hope!

**As they pass through the Red Sea they are forever bound to Hope**

- *I will sing unto the Lord for He has triumphed gloriously.*

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- So this practice of coming through the water that is actually connected to the creation and is a part of cleansing is called Mikveh or baptism.
- In creation we see the Spirit of the Lord hover over the water and separate the water to proclaim light, life, order and beauty.
- The root Hebrew words for baptism - Mikveh - **means to be bound to hope!**

Fascinating is that in the prophets the word for baptism is used to describe God Himself  
Jeremiah 17:3

- *You are the Hope (Mikveh) of Israel.*

**So as Mark begins to tell us about Good News he begins by talking about the Mikveh baptism of John the baptist and the baptism of Jesus.**

First I want to point out that the practice of Baptism was and is to this day a very Jewish practice that is mostly connected to the Exodus but is referenced as far back as creation.

The practice of going into the water to be cleansed and becoming bound to the promise of Hope in the face of incredible uncertainty.

#### **1. The Baptism of John – about repentance.**

- So this needs to be really clear that the practice of baptism was not something John the baptist came up with - what made his baptism unique was the call to not just be ceremonially cleansed but to Repent in life and lifestyle.
- So watch this as John is calling men and women to be baptized he is calling them to re-examine how they were living and inhabiting their world. To repent is not so much to feel sorry for our mistakes but to agree with God's opinion.
- So John is proclaiming - there is another way to live - another way to live connected to Hope!
  - Verse 2 Behold - Take a look at that...the way of the Lord....is different.
  - It is NOT the same as you have known....
- Repentance beloved as John is proclaiming it here is not so much about being aware of what we have done or not done but becoming aware of what God has done.
- The repentance that produces freedom and makes a way for the Lord is about what He has done.
- John's baptism was a call to faith - to Hope.

**Then we come to Jesus baptism – Mikveh**

#### **2. Jesus who binds Himself to the Promise of God for the people of God – Hope!**

- Man think about this the God who hovered over the waters of creation is now entering the waters the chaos and confusion – what is formless and void - to bring light, life, order and beauty.
- To cleanse forever those who come to Him by faith to proclaim there is another way.... the way of Jesus with the heart of Jesus.
- Part of what happens next - Mark sees another realm - sees the Spirit descend and he hears this incredible proclamation over Jesus: who has just bound Himself to Hope in Mikveh baptism  
***You are My beloved Son, in you I am well pleased.***

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**3. You are my beloved....He hears the Good Opinion of His Father!**

- All the images of a disconnected ungenerous uncaring father.....have to fade because what we see here is a father expressing utter delight and Joy in His Son!
- Heaven has come **for earth from Heaven** – without violence – in love!
- Because Jesus bound Himself to Hope and He heard the good opinion of His Father...His Blessing you are my beloved in whom I have delight...1<sup>st</sup> Person declaration.

**Watch this that is Good News - not just for Jesus...**

- **The way He looks at Jesus is the way He looks at you!**

John 17:23 '*...You love each one of them with the same passionate love You have for Me...*'

**What if we could begin to Repent and locate the Good News right here right now?**

- Here is where the good news starts - in 2024 in my life!
- There is a God who has forever bound my life to Hope – this is what prayer is about.
- Who feels about me the way He feels about His own Son!

**What's Next....I don't know...but I do know where we are invited to start.**

**Question for us today is simple**

**Where do we start...**

1 - Hear the call to change my mind - that might begin with me proclaiming that there is still good news for me for my family and for our culture in 2024! That is found by preparing a way for Jesus in my life.

2 - Will I bind my life to Hope? Contemporary American author Frederick Buechner has written, "A Christian is one who points at Christ and says, 'I can't prove a thing, but there's something about his eyes and his voice. There's something about the way he carries his head, his hands, the way he carries his cross - the way he carries me.'"

- 2 Cor. 1:20 Kingdom NT
- *All God's promises, you see, find their yes in him; and that's why we say the yes, the "Amen," through him when we pray to God and give him glory.*

3 - What will I behold? - To Study the ways of Jesus – to love humility.  
Take a look at that?

- Am I beholding the future...with fear – fear that separate and divide...or in surrender to the posture and presence of Jesus?

**In a world asking 'whats next?'- Mark locates the good news not in a political Savior or the hope of personal security ( something most followers of Jesus had no real hope for ). Mark locates the Good News not in empire or emperor but in a the Good News of Jesus Christ the Messiah.**

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**Closing Prayer**

**Replace my fears with love**

Loving God:  
Replace my fears with love.  
Where I fear lack, bring abundance.  
Where I fear sickness, bring wholeness.  
Where I fear others, bring reconciliation.  
Where I fear being wrong, bring freedom.  
Forgive the ways I use fear as an excuse to limit love.  
Forgive me when I use my thoughts and words as tools of fear.  
You are love.  
Humanity is your beloved.  
I often forget this in my fears. Today, I wish to remember.  
Amen.

**Communion**

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