

***Christ To The Word -
Child Of God***

Mark 1:9-15

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It was one of those moments that we all savour.
When who we are and what we're working towards is affirmed.
When we celebrate.
When all is good.

So was the time of Jesus' baptism.
He that had given up his seat of privilege in heaven and become born as a human;
 who had lived thirty years with his parents in humility and poverty;
 who had gone through teething, scraped his knee learning to walk, banged his thumb wielding a
hammer, experienced misunderstandings with his parents, watched - as best we can tell - his earthly father
die....
 ...all the stuff of living and growing up
 that one, that Jesus is now setting out on his own.

His whole reason for coming to earth is about to come into the open.
Learning is at an end.
Vocation time is about to begin.

It is not unlike graduation that some of you will experience this spring.
The time of study has concluded.
Exams come to an end.
The word comes down from the teacher - you've passed.

And now it is celebration.
Calvin will be hosting two such celebrations in the coming days for OCS and Redeemer High.
 And we want to acknowledge and congratulate all you who will graduate from these schools, as well
as from other schools.
 Well done!
 I do hope that you'll have a chance to celebrate with family and friends.

And then maybe enjoy a bit of a break before heading off to do whatever it is you'll be doing next.

Which would be very much UNLIKE Jesus.
He didn't get any such break.

Oh, don't get me wrong.
There WAS the affirmation.

A celebration and a loving voice from heaven -
 "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Mk 1:11)

Hurrah!
Thirty years of human life - now baptism, and a smiling nod of approval from heaven.

Time for a party with friends and family?
Time for a bit of a vacation out on some Mediterranean beach, perhaps?

Verse 12 interrupts such speculation.
 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

You'll note that he wasn't even allowed to go there for only an hour or two and then head home. Verse 13:
 *He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the
angels waited on him.*

The Spirit **DROVE** him into the wilderness.
Yes - that's the same Spirit that descended on him at baptism like a dove.
Nothing dove-like about being driven into a place that is hot and dry and dangerous.
 Driven - As one person puts it, *"The Spirit picks Jesus up like some bouncer at a nightclub and throws
him through the front window. When Jesus picks himself up and dusts himself off, he finds himself in an ugly,*

spiritually dangerous place - in the company of the devil out in the middle of the wilderness, the biblical symbol for all that is wrong with this fallen creation.

[Scott Hoezee in *Reformed Worship* v.90 p.22]

The wilderness - exactly the opposite of the Garden of Eden.
The wilderness - where thorns and thistles grow; where people die.
The wilderness - instead of lush loveliness, it is harsh chaos.

And the animals - what sort do you expect live there?

Cute little bunnies, chipmunks who snatch peanuts from your hand, chickadees who chirp in branches near your shoulder?

Try poisonous snakes. Or jackals. Or lions.

Predators who are looking for the next meal.

And you've got "*pick me*" stapled to your back.

That's where Jesus is sent.

He is sent there **IMMEDIATELY**, says verse 12.

No time to pause.

No time to question.

No room to answer, "*Maybe later.*"

The world that God created, and to which he looked and smiled and said, "*it is good*" is groaning, says Romans 8.

Crying out the way a woman in labour cries and groans.

Crying and groaning because of pain.

And God is not about to turn his back on that Creation.

There is no time to lose.

So the Saviour needs to enter it **IMMEDIATELY**.

IMMEDIATELY he challenges the curse.

IMMEDIATELY he confronts evil face to face.

Oh - he doesn't do this alone.

That's the divinely gracious part of it.

Did you notice what is often missed in verse 13?

And the angels waited on him.....

In Greek it reads, "*and the angels served as deacons to him.*"

They cared for his needs in that vulnerable place and time.

Yes - with the assistance of heaven Jesus engages in the beginning of what would be a life-long confrontation with evil.

The life of the Saviour is not a life hidden away in some spiritual retreat centre.

The life of the Saviour does not revolve around building a financially viable ministry organization, with a secure position for himself as CEO.

It involves bringing the claims of the Kingdom of God out there, and challenging the imposter claims of the Evil One.

To get out there and get in the face of Satan and all the conniving, twisting deceit that the Devil sows all through creation.

That is the life of the Son of God.

And - yes, you can see where this is going already, can't you?

It is **ALSO** to be the life of the people of God.

It was already the calling for God's Old Testament people -

- to live as light and a holy influence in dark and sometimes dangerous places.

One of you responded to this week's PKN note by reminiscing about a sermon once heard on Jeremiah 29.

There we read about God's people who had been exiled to Babylon. Babylon was an evil city. It screamed values from every billboard and corner that were completely foreign to everything that believers in God stood for.

Believers worried for their children - didn't want them playing with Babylonian children or signing up for their baseball teams or marrying Babylonian children. They didn't want to shop in Babylonian stores. They didn't want to buy houses there.

They just wanted to go home - back to Jerusalem, to the Temple, where everyone believed what they believed, where they could relax.

And then comes an enormous heavenly shock through the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.....

And then listen to what comes next!

BUT SEEK THE WELFARE OF THE CITY WHERE I HAVE SENT YOU INTO EXILE, AND PRAY TO THE LORD ON ITS BEHALF, FOR IN ITS WELFARE YOU WILL FIND YOUR WELFARE. (Jer 29:7)

Do you think that maybe those people of God, living there in Babylon, felt a little bit like Jesus felt when he was in the desert with the wild animals?

A little unsure.

Not terribly safe.

Certainly not comfortable.

Wondering when time would be up and they could go home.

And God looks at them and says, "*Stop looking at your watch. You're here for the long haul. Get out there and engage the place where I have put you.*"

Which is the same message that Jesus passes along to his followers.

Matthew 10:16 *"Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. Be as wary as snakes and harmless as doves*

Matthew 28:19 *Go and make disciples of all nations....*

John 14:12 *"The truth is, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works..."*

The same sort of work that Jesus does is what his followers are called to do.

It would be easy, **oh so easy**, for believers to settle comfortably into a tranquil oasis of faith; into a refuge from the harsh reality out there. It would be easy

to settle back and allow our lives to be consumed by in-house matters in our local congregation;

where every moment of our lives is caught up in being on this church committee, and taking part in that bible study, and going to that gathering, and inviting over these church friends.....

and then, as one of our elders noted as last Monday night's meeting, all our neighbours see of us is a wave of the hand as we head off to yet another cloistered church thingy.

And before we know it very little of what we read in the paper has any immediate relevance to our lives.

We've never stopped to speak to a street person.

We have no idea about the struggles that are endured by those caught in the trap of the working poor.

Never come alongside someone struggling with sexual orientation.

No idea what discrimination feels like.

Or what addictions can do.

Or what it is to face the prospect of death without any real certainty of whether or not God loves us.

Friends - if you have heard God's voice welcoming you as his child, you can be sure that you will ALSO hear

the compelling command of the Spirit to get involved somewhere in the wilderness, in the broken or dangerous and dry chaos that is our world.

It cannot be otherwise.

And it is our calling throughout our earthly journey.

If as a church all the dollars that flow in get spent on ourselves, we are missing the calling of God.

If as a church all the programs that we organize are for our own benefit, we are missing the calling of God.

If as individual believers we cannot point to some way that we personally engage the wilderness of our world in the name of Jesus, we are coming up well short of what God wants from us as his children.

And that may be different than we instinctively think.

Somehow our culture has infiltrated the Western Church enough so that it becomes easy to think that the whole deal of Christianity is to give us comfort, to make us secure, and to revel in our blessings.

And when difficulties show up, it is easy for Christians to get all flustered and either run away from them as fast as possible or begin to moan and cry that God has abandoned them.

I'm not saying that is always the case.

But that it is easy to let things go in this direction.

And I'd like to encourage us to do two things.

One is to do an inventory

- each of our own lives

- and, particularly for those of you in positions of influence and leadership in this congregation, to do an inventory of the organizational life of Calvin CRC.

How much of what we do is for and about ourselves?

Can we look our Wilderness-dwelling Saviour in the eye and give an account of that inventory? And feel good about it?

Some of us can.

Well done - good and faithful servants! You understand. You spend time with the street people. You share faith with the questioning. You give an ear to the struggling. You lobby on behalf of the voiceless. You hug those that smell a bit different than yourself.

Know that God sends his angels to be deacons to you, even as you engage in deacon work to others.

Perhaps some of us will realize that perhaps things need to shift.

You may want to pray about that. Just be careful - God may answer!!

If you run stuck, call the deacons up, or tap one on a shoulder and say, "Can you help me find a place or way that I can be of service out there?"

My prayer and vision is for a church full of people that connect in all sorts of different ways with the Babylon called "Ottawa."

And blessing it by their connections.

Leaders - talk about it, pray about it, dream about it.

You'll be discussing it further on September 26. And planning.

And we don't want to face that date like a deer staring in the headlights of Jack Luimes' transport truck.

What is God's Jeremiah-calling to our church in this city?

I said there were two things I'd like us to do.

And that is the first.

The second is this.

When we find ourselves in a challenging situation, let's not immediately begin to wonder why God has picked on us, or why he has abandoned us, or let us down.

Because quite possibly he hasn't done any of those things.

See, often when we find ourselves in such situations - in the hard places of life - we find ourselves rubbing shoulders with other people in similar situations. At food banks. In doctors offices or clinics. Standing in lineups. Or in town hall meetings. Or in support groups.

And could it be that while we are there the angels of God may well provide us with the resources to be a source of new hope and encouragement and life to someone who we meet there?

Calling us, perhaps, to pray, "Lord, in the midst of this sorrow and pain and struggling space of life where I now am, please use me."

Perhaps we need to think whether in times that we are uncomfortable, in places where we feel out of place,

Perhaps that is precisely where we are called to be.

In the wilderness.

Among the forces that seek to tear at and destroy the goodness of God's creation.

And to be agents of the Saviour right there.

Without running away.

Knowing that the angels are there.

And that we are accomplishing not what feels good or leads to wealth, health and happiness, but the higher purposes of God. And we do that obediently.

And we do that with the promise of Jesus,

"And remember, I am with you always, to the end of time." (Mt 28:20)