

“Jesus Sighting: At the River”

Mark 1:9-11

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A preacher was completing a sermon on the evils of getting drunk. He mentioned that getting drunk starts with that first drink. So with great expression he said, "If I had all the beer in the world, I'd take it and throw it into the river." With even greater emphasis he said, "And if I had all the wine in the world, I'd take it and throw it into the river."

And then finally, he said, "And if I had all the whiskey in the world, I'd take it and throw it into the river."

He sat down. The song leader then stood very cautiously and announced with a smile, "For our closing song, let us sing Hymn # 723: "Shall We Gather at the River." Woo-hoo!!!! Well we are going to be talking about not spirits....but the Holy Spirit this morning.

We begin our sermon series....Jesus Sighting with a sighting of Jesus At the River. But as we are in this Jesus Sighting series I want you to be asking, "Have you seen Jesus my Lord!" What was He doing? Well, friends...Jesus is here!!!! As I quoted a 70's 'Jesus Song' in Direct from Dave... "He's here in plain view. Take a look....open your eyes."

Now I have had the privilege of doing many Baptism over the years. Many by our Methodist tradition have been infant baptisms. Most of the Baptism's I've done have been in the church, however I have done Baptisms in the ocean, swimming pools, in the Jordan River in Israel at the place where Jesus' Baptism is commemorated, and I have also done a Baptism in a pond that was fed from a canal that had an alligator in it. Let me just say...it was a quick baptism.

So...we have a Jesus sighting at the River. This sighting is recorded in all 4 Gospels. It's in Matthew chapter 3 (1-17), the passage read this morning from Mark, in Luke 3 (21-22) and mention as well in John 1 (29-34).

Much of the descriptive part of the Baptism story comes from Matthew. So we find John the Methodist, I mean, John the Baptist is preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In Matthew's Gospel it says that he his clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist and that his food was locusts and wild honey. Do you get the picture? I see him as a rough looking dude, caveman like leather garment on and to top it off he has not used mouth wash and he has locust and wild honey breath. I see him not as a calm, sedate, mild mannered man. I see him excitedly preaching and pointing the way for Jesus. A voice calling in the desert preparing the way of the Lord. He's saying "Repent, the kingdom of heaven is near." I don't think John says that calmly. xxx I don't think he says that in a monotone. xxx I don't think he says it quietly. Xxx

John wants to be clear about the announcement and the message. John is better at conflict management than I am. He is much more willing to confront. People are coming out to be baptized by him and he looks at them, there he is dressed in his finest camels' hair suit, with a honey locust glaze on his lips and he tells them, "You brood of vipers!"

Here's The Message version of that section: **Matthew 3:7-10**

When John realized that a lot of Pharisees and Sadducees were showing up for a baptismal experience because it was becoming the popular thing to do, he exploded: "Brood of snakes! What do you think you're doing slithering down here to the river? Do you think a little water on your snakeskins is going to make any difference? It's your life that must change, not your skin! And don't think you can pull rank by claiming Abraham as father. Being a descendant of Abraham is neither here nor there. Descendants of Abraham are a dime a dozen. What counts is your life. Is it green and blossoming? Because if it's deadwood, it goes on the fire.

In essence he says in verse 8 "Don't give me the excuse that Abraham was your father." You see we might say I'm a Methodist because my mommy was, and her mommy before her, and her mommy before her. Or it's like saying I'm a Christian because my great-great-great-great Grandfather was. Well, isn't that great. But friends---Christianity is not inherited. You must personally make a decision and live out that decision---produce the fruit of repentance.

On this Sunday in which we remember the Baptism of Jesus people often wonder, "Why was Jesus baptized?" Good question. It was not because He needed to repent of His sin, for He was sinless.

Jesus was baptized because:

- 1. This was the public announcement that He was the Messiah, the Promised one.**
- 2. It was the beginning of His ministry.**
- 3. It completely identified Him with our sin and failure.**
- 4. It was an example to His followers.**

Back in our scripture reading in Mark it says that Jesus came up out of the water and he saw "the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove."

Oh, "Open up the Heavens....we want to see you..." Lord unveil our eyes....show us, show us your glory. Show us, show us your power. We want to see you." (**Image of Jesus and the heavens opening up**) To learn from a 3rd grader.... "I want all of heaven coming into all of me!!!!" Opens up.....tear open the heavens.

Three days after terrorist crashed hijacked planes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, President George W. Bush designated Friday, September 14, 2001 as a national day of Prayer and remembrance. I'm sure that those old enough to remember know exactly where we were on 9-11. At that prayer service in Washington D.C., the National Cathedral was filled to capacity with invited guests including political leaders, military brass and 4 former presidents and their

wives. At President Bush's request, 82-year-old Billy Graham, even with Parkinson's disease, was escorted to the pulpit to give a stirring sermon.

Some of you may remember watching this live or on video footage. After several religious leaders had spoken, George W. Bush strode to the podium. It was his turn to address the American people. He acknowledged our nation's need for dependence on God. He gave a compassionate message to those who felt abandoned by God over the death of over 5, 000 innocent victims.

However, you may not remember what happened next when he went to his seat. It brought tears to my eyes. **(Video clip)**

George W. Bush returned to his seat and sat down next to the smiling First Lady. His father, former President George H.W. Bush (41)---beaming with pride, looked straight ahead, but reached his hand across Laura Bush for his son's hand. It was a silent but unmistakable way of saying, "you are my son, and I am well pleased."

I don't know what exactly was going through the mind of the son, President George W., but I would imagine that it must have been quite encouraging to know of the support and pride of his father. Uncertain days were ahead, trying days were ahead, criticisms and hard decisions were ahead, and yet his father gave him support.

And the Heavenly Father gave His son support knowing that the days ahead were going to be days of trial and temptation, uncertain days, days of criticism and days of disbelief when hard decisions and choices would need to be made. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased."

Open up the Heavens...I want to see Jesus. But oh, open up the heavens, I want to HEAR Jesus.

What if the heavens opened up and God began to communicate with us.

And heaven said: My child, it's okay, I know you're hurting.

And heaven said, "You don't need to feel guilty anymore." "Be at peace."

And heaven said, "My child ask for forgiveness."

"My child I'm going to give you strength to face uncertain days." "Be courageous."

And heaven said, "Don't be so hard on yourself, I love you more than you love yourself."

And heaven said, "My child, you need to make some changes in your life."

How well are we listening today? Can you hear him call you by name and say, "This is MY child and with you I am well pleased."

Going to do something today that I have never ever done on a congregational scale. I have done it for small groups, but not as an entire congregation. It is a Reaffirmation of our Baptism Covenant. This is for those that have already been baptized. As Methodists we don't really re-baptize, but once baptized we at some point in time, like today, want to reaffirm our baptism. At baptism God made a covenant with us. It was His act of forgiving us of our sins. God has always remained faithful on the divine side, but the human side....maybe there needs to be a Reaffirmation or Recommitment.

This is for those that have already been baptized. It might have been when you were a baby, a teen, or an adult. It might have been by sprinkling, or immersion. That was then....and yes it took...but perhaps you would want to put your hand in the water...and reclaim and remember your baptism. Now if you were baptized as an infant you may wonder how can I remember my baptism. By faith. By faith you were baptized as an infant into God's prevenient Grace. It was God's act. His grace came over you. You then grew in faith to repent of your sin and acknowledge your salvation.

We will have stations like we do for Communion. A server will be holding a bowl of water. You are to put your finger or fingers into the bowl and make the sign of the cross on your forehead. We will be singing a song while we are doing this, ushers will not escort you. Come as you feel led. Wherever you are sitting come towards the center aisle and come to the station in front of you.

(LITURGY)