

## **A Reflection on Mark Chapter I vv 1-8**

**By Julie Tate**

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May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Today is the second Sunday of Advent. We are now on a journey through Advent together. As we travel through Advent towards Christmas it is rather ironic that our readings in this Church year come from Mark's Gospel, which doesn't even mention Christmas.

Instead he begins his Gospel, his Good news, with this account of Jesus' Baptism by John the Baptist. Why does he begin here and what is he telling us about the nature of the Good News he is telling?

The first thing we learn from Mark about this good news is that it is good news according to God's plan and was foretold hundreds of years before by the prophets.

The Messiah they announced was to be the Saviour-King who was coming to rescue his people from their enemies and re-establish God's reign as King. The "way of the Lord" also mentioned by prophets, was announced long before it ever came to pass. John the Baptist is identified by Mark as part of the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies he quotes.

What Mark teaches us through John is that this good news is one that demands radical humility.

The prophets tell us that John would be preparing the way of the Lord by focusing on preparing the hearts of those who heard him. This voice crying in the wilderness announces a radical call for redirection. What John is saying is, "You are going the wrong direction in life. You need to turn around."

This is what repentance is. It is a changing of our mind about the direction of our life. But John's baptism was simply getting people ready, getting them

turned in the right direction for the' way of the Lord 'that was going to be revealed.

John not only proclaimed humility, he practiced it - showing people just what it entailed. He also performed a symbolic act of cleansing because Jesus, the One who was coming, would administer a spiritual cleansing through God's own Spirit.

But how can being told you are way off track, that you are misguided, that you're wrong, how can that be good news? Does it really sound like good news to you? To many it would be anything but good news; they are quite content or as content as they can be in this difficult world, getting whatever good news they can from wherever they can – TV, film, books, famous personalities, the news at times even politicians!

Well, receiving this good news requires first being prepared to receive it. And that means recognizing we're going the wrong direction. That's the function that John the Baptist was carrying out in preparing the "way of the Lord".

The good news that the prophets spoke of comes through God's own Son, Jesus. And its good news because, just like a blind man about to walk over a cliff would be grateful for a warning shout to alert him to what was happening, this is the only good news that is going to prevent us falling off our own spiritual cliff and ultimately save us.

When I am teaching in school, often my students would ask 'but why was Jesus baptized, if he is perfect and without sin'? Well Matthew's gospel is a bit more helpful here because he actually speaks of John asking why Jesus is coming for baptism. There Jesus responds, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all". I think Jesus presenting himself to John shows that Jesus wanted to fully identify with humanity, even to the extent that he would enter the water to be baptized.

The Baptism of Jesus is actually a great place to start a Gospel, an account of Good News. Jesus is to be the agent of God's deliverance, of complete forgiveness through a spiritual baptism. This was meant to be a tangible picture of a spiritual reality, that is, God's anointing upon Jesus. Even the picture of the heavens opening is an image from the Old Testament of God breaking in to our reality on behalf of His people.

You see, if this is the beginning, we have to ask, where does it go from here? The good news that alerts us to the fact that we are going the wrong way will be driven home as nails are driven into the body of Jesus because of our waywardness and rebellion against God.

The good news that clearly identifies for us the Man that God has appointed to bring us real forgiveness and life 'in all its' abundance' will be powerfully confirmed when that Man comes back from the dead.

So to what or whom are you looking for good news? Well it's really good news that there is no need for confusion. God has made it clear that Jesus is the One we need. It is THE Good News, the gospel that puts all other news in perspective; that helps us to discern, to prioritize, to truly love, and live. And it begins with radical humility from us.

Amen