

January 10, 2021

Baptism of our Lord, Mark 4:1-11, Psalm 29

(recorded while in quarantine for exposure to COVID-19)

Good morning, and welcome to this rather unusual, recorded worship for this Sunday. It seems almost fitting that our worship should be somewhat unusual this week, as the events leading up to today have been most unusual to say the least. Ironically, after our COVID-19 Task Force meeting Tuesday evening, where we noted that the Coronavirus pandemic has been hitting closer to home for many of us, I found out Wednesday afternoon that my son-in-law tested positive for the virus. Following proper protocol, Marian and I have been voluntarily avoiding contact with others and will do so for at least ten days. Thus, I am recording this message from home.

I want to send a heartfelt thank you to Jay Snyder for leading worship from the church this week. Jay had volunteered to be lector this week and the night before we were to record the service, I called and asked if he would instead of only reading the lessons, do everything but the sermon (and the hymns, of course, which we thank Joyce VanNieuwkuyk for.) Jay didn't hesitate to say, "yes" and together he, Joyce, and Chris Bair as cameraperson, recorded the service as if we had always done it that way. It is both gratifying and humbling to know that the church can function in my absence. Thank God that we have so many talented people willing to step up when needed.

I'll pick up this morning following the Gospel reading, as we usually do, with the children's sermon, so if the kids are around, please have them gather around as we talk about Baptism and the Baptism of Jesus:

Grace to you and peace from God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Lately, and especially this past week, we have been hearing a lot of voices resonating all around us, and many of those voices have not been pleasant. The voices of doctors and others reiterating the seriousness of the Coronavirus pandemic even as we await the widespread vaccination that has just begun. The voices of our national leaders ringing out amidst the chaos and pandemonium surrounding the results of our presidential election and the preparation for a transfer of power at the most powerful level of world leadership.

We hear the voices of small business owners, especially in the restaurant and other service industries calling out for help to survive the restrictions placed on them in hopes of curbing the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Health care workers hospital administrators and other medical personnel speaking voices of comfort and reassurance to patients while they are themselves experiencing stress beyond anything they ever imagined. Teachers trying their best to educate our children via remote learning, parents wondering how to cope with childcare when their children are not in school and concerns about how best to help our children and grandchildren understand and interpret the many voices they are inundated with, no matter how much we try to protect their innocent understanding of the world. Voices; conflicting voices, comforting voices; loud voices, whispering voices; strange voices, familiar voices. To which voices do we listen, which voices do we ignore? When do we react and when do we keep silent? How might we add the voice of the Christian church to the mix in a way that helps and does not harm?

The first thing we need to do is listen to the one voice that is too often ignored, the one voice that can make a real difference in our lives and in the world: the voice of the Lord!

In our Psalm for today, we hear about the voice of the Lord, “The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice, the voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees, the voice of the Lord bursts forth in lightning flashes, the voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness.” Yet for all its power, the voice of the Lord is not heard unless we listen **for** it and listen **to** it.

The psalmist tells us that the Lord sits enthroned as king forevermore, the king to whom we owe our ultimate allegiance, the king to whom we owe our very lives, the king whose voice tells us to love the lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to **love our neighbors as ourselves!** Is that what we see happening in our nation right now? As people declare their allegiance to one party or another, are we listening for the voice of our king? As we attack one another verbally and physically, literally and figuratively, are we obeying the voice that tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves? It seems to me that the voice of the Lord has been tuned out and the chaos and pandemonium we are suffering is the result!

We hear the voice of the Lord again in our Gospel reading, at the Baptism of Jesus, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

One of the most important aspects of Jesus’ baptism is that it sets the pattern for our own. Jesus certainly did not need to be baptized to “wash away his sins”, which is

one of the benefits of Holy Baptism for us, but the resulting announcement that Jesus is God's beloved child is the same for us as it was for Jesus.

Let me share Martin Luther's explanation of baptism from the Small Catechism as Luther says, "the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to [their] household." As I do, listen to how many times Luther mentions the **voice** of the Lord as God's **word**, and as he points to what Jesus **says**. (READ)

The word of God, the sayings of Jesus, the voice of the Lord works by the power of the Holy Spirit to make us God's children, God's beloved, with whom God is well pleased, not because of any merit on our part but out of the radical abundance of God's own divine mercy.

When the voices of the doctors are telling us that thousands are being infected with a virus that is still in many ways beyond our control, the voice of the Lord offers hope and healing for his beloved children. When the voices on the news are reporting hundreds of people dying every day, the voice of the Lord promises that, "just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too, may live a new life."

When the voices of the world seem overwhelming, turn down the speakers in your head, tune in the receiver in your heart, hear the voice of the Lord "YOU are my child, my beloved; with you I am well pleased." Thanks be to God. Amen