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Mark 1:9-13

*Mark's Epiphany series: "Diving In"*

Today we begin our congregational study, our Bible journey, through the Gospel of Mark. As you heard earlier, we're going to dive into seven short stories this week; and we're encouraging every member of Hope, young and old, to dive in with us. We want to spend the next five weeks together, as a congregation, in the Gospel of Mark.

Does the Gospel of Mark tell us how to cope with the pandemic fatigue we're all experiencing? No. Will the Gospel of Mark instruct us how to solve our nation's deep-rooted political, racial, and economic problems? No. We could've used that this week, right? Does the Gospel of Mark let us know which Power Ball numbers to pick, or tell us which NFL team is going to pull off a playoff upset today? No. Can the Gospel of Mark tell you how to get along better with your boss, your parents, your neighbors, your spouse? No.

But the Gospel of Mark gives us something way better, something much more important. When we read the Gospel of Mark, we're reading Mark's Epiphany. When someone has an epiphany, they have a revelation. They see a manifestation of the divine. This man Mark – who was not one of the twelve apostles, but who was a close associate of one of them (Peter); and who was a missionary in the days of St. Paul – Mark, in his Gospel, shows us what he learned about Jesus.

"Here he is, the Son of God," Mark proclaims, in his Gospel. "Here is Jesus, coming to save the world, coming with divine authority, coming for all the lost, for the broken, and for all those who are trampled, beaten up, and discouraged by the sinful world around them."

In this New Year 2021, I say we American Christians all need Jesus Christ in our lives. We need all the Jesus Christ we can get. So let's dive into our first story today.

Now, some of you are really sharp. "Why are we reading Mark 1:9-13 today? Why aren't we diving in with Mark 1:1-8?" Well, we actually started tip-toeing into the Gospel of Mark last month. Remember Pastor Wagner's excellent sermon on the second Sunday of Advent? Check it out on the website, if you missed it. He preached on Mark 1:1-8, about John the Baptist, and helped get our Mark journey started.

Today, though, no tip-toeing. This week we dive in to Mark's Gospel, beginning with the stories of Jesus' baptism and his temptation. There they are on the screen.

Notice how short they are. This is Mark's style. And if you're wondering if you're going to have time to do all of this Bible reading during the week, notice that Mark is not wordy. Mark is much more concise than the other Gospel writers (Matthew, Luke, and John). His Gospel is fast-paced, and quick. Jesus does this, and Jesus does that. Jesus went here, Mark tells us, and immediately Jesus goes there. It's my theory that Mark must have not been a preacher. Preachers, I'm told, tend to be a bit more long-winded.

Now, we've been nudging you today to dive into this congregational study with us. But what Mark shows us today, in these two tiny snippets, is Jesus diving in. Jesus going down into the water. Jesus entering and embracing our humanity. Jesus diving into his mission. Jesus plunging into our world of sin, evil, and temptation.

Let's think, first, about his baptism. What kind of a baptism was this, that John was doing out there in the Jordan River

wilderness? It wasn't a Christian baptism. Nobody knew Jesus yet. John was baptizing people as a mark of their own repentance. He wanted them to confess their sin, and then to get down in the water as a way of saying, "God, I admit I've screwed up. I know I need a fresh, clean start with you."

So a lot of people listened to John's preaching, repented, and were baptized by him. But why was Jesus baptized? He wasn't a sinner. He was human, like us, and we need to be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins. But Jesus never sinned.

By being baptized, Jesus was diving in. God's Son wasn't on earth to go sightseeing, or to play tourist. He was on a mission to save human souls. Christ's baptism was on Day One of his public ministry, his saving work for you and me. So by lowering himself into the waters on Day One, Jesus was identifying himself fully, connecting himself completely, with sinful humanity, with you and me. Jesus, on his baptism day, was diving in there with us.

Mark shares very few details, though, right? Read verse 9 with me: "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan." All Mark says is, Jesus "was baptized." But when you read those words, know what it means. Know that God's Son was diving in, embracing his mission, beginning his salvation work for you.

Let's read verse 10, and notice who else is diving in. "And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove."

Remember the Old Testament lesson for today, from the creation account in Genesis 1? "The Spirit of God was

hovering over the face of the waters.” Here, Mark is pointing out that this Jesus, standing in the water, dripping wet, is not just some average dude getting baptized at Hope Lutheran Church, or at St. Catherine’s, or at Falls Lake. The Holy Spirit is making an appearance at Christ’s baptism, hovering over him! The Holy Spirit is embracing the Son’s mission on Day One, diving in to empower and energize Jesus.

And who else dives in? Read verse 11 with me: “And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’” That’s God the Father diving in, blessing and endorsing Jesus and his salvation mission.

And then, Mark tells us, using his signature word, “immediately,” Jesus goes out to the wilderness for forty days. He dives further into our sin-filled world. He experiences severe temptations, as we do every day, and he’s assaulted by Satan directly and personally. Mark doesn’t share many specifics, but he makes it clear that, from the start, Jesus was diving in, 100% committed, totally, unreservedly, on our behalf.

This beginning to our Mark study is all rather remarkable (pardon the pun). This Jesus is the Savior we need. This rescue mission Jesus, -- this Savior of the world Jesus -- what he offers us is more precious than anything in this world. This story of God’s Son coming for you and me is the basis of our faith. It’s the reason for our hope. It’s the most priceless thing we could ever offer to our friends, family, and neighbors.

Mark’s Epiphany – his revelation of who Jesus really is, for you and me. Let’s dive in together! Amen.