

“MARKED FOR LIFE”

Pastor Mike Corwin

TEXT: MARK 1:4-11

GOD’S WORD: ACTS 19:1-7

I – MARKED PEOPLE:

I wonder how many of you have heard the saying that someone is a “marked man?” The definition of a marked man, which can also be a marked woman, is “a person who is singled out for special treatment, especially bad treatment.” It usually refers to someone who is going to get treated poorly or even killed, for some reason or the other, someone who is going to suffer retaliation or revenge from someone. To be a marked person is not a good thing to be.

This idea has grown over the years and we have marked people who are marked just by who they are or what they’ve done. Treating them badly is not always a purposeful thing, but it seems to happen anyhow. Some people fit into the category of being marked simply by their skin color or their ethnicity. Some people are marked by who they are born to...what side of the tracks they come from. Marked by how much money they have or how they are forced to live. Some are marked in this day and age by things like addiction or even gender. There are those who are marked as felons because of something they’ve done in the past and served time for and have had some of their rights like voting stripped away.

I see this marked theme in the first book of the Bible as I did the darkness theme last week. Remember the story of Cain and Abel. The first recorded murder was when Cain took his brother Abel out into the fields and killed him out of jealousy because God accepted his gift and not Cain’s. God calls Cain to account and throws him out of the land his parents were in and from God’s presence. Made him a homeless wanderer. Cain cried out in his anguish and tells God he fears he will be killed by others and God says that won’t happen and to make sure it doesn’t in Chapter 4, verse 15 it says that God put a mark on Cain to warn anyone who would try to kill him. So Even though Cain was being punished I see that in this case being marked was a good thing.

II – BAPTISM MARK:

I can see this in this morning’s God’s Word reading. That there are good marks people can have too. The one I want to speak about today is the mark of baptism. It is one of the two Holy Sacraments of the United Methodist Church, the other being Communion There are only two because they are the only ones we see Jesus participate in himself. Sacrament means they are sacred...they are set apart. This means that Baptism is a sacred and good mark.

In the story from Acts we see that Paul is working in the area and comes to the city of Ephesus. While there he meets some disciples who had been baptized somewhere along the way. He asks them if they had received the Holy Spirit at the time of their baptism and they replied they hadn't. As they discuss further Paul explains to them that they had been baptized into John the Baptists baptism. The baptism of repentance to prepare them for the coming of Jesus. But now things had changed. The Messiah, Jesus the Christ had come and lived among his people, had died to forgive his people, and had been resurrected to destroy sin and death for his people. To be marked by this new baptism was saying they were in the Kingdom of God. This was a good mark. Paul then baptized them again in the name of Jesus and he laid his hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

This receiving of the Spirit was an important mark of being baptized into Jesus. The oldest baptism rite ever found was in the Church of Hippolytus which would reflect the practice in Rome in AD 100 and used both water and the laying on of hands where the baptized one received the Holy Spirit. At the end of the baptism ritual we use today we lay our hands upon the person, baby or adult, and say the words:

“The Holy Spirit work within you,
That being born through water and the Spirit,
You may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. Amen”

Or some such words. As we do the actual baptism with water we say the person's name and then:

“I baptize you in the name of the Father,
And of the Son,
And of the Holy Spirit. Amen”

We don't baptize in the name of the preacher, or the bishop, or the United Methodist Church. We baptize in the name of the Trinity. We mark them for God.

III – TEXT:

Then we get to today's text, the Baptism of Jesus, where we can learn more about this subject. Here's the event as recorded in Mark's Gospel.

MARK 1:4-11 (NLT)

⁴This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. ⁵All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. ⁶His clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey.

⁷ John announced: “Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to stoop down like a slave and untie the straps of his sandals. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!”

⁹ One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. ¹⁰ As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.”

John the Baptist came to prepare the way for the Lord. He preached repentance but it wasn’t a general repentance for everything you had done. You didn’t go back and keep getting baptized. His was a baptism of special repentance to prepare people to receive and accept the Messiah. That’s why he was born to Elizabeth and the prophecy that he would prepare the way for Jesus. John was building a community that was ready for the reign of God. His baptism was to reorient a person’s life in that moment.

There’s another image here we need to catch. It tells us that John dressed in rough camel hair and ate wild honey and locust. This was a sign of a prophet. They lived out someplace, dressed plainly, and ate “natural food.” This small description is to remind the readers of the prophet Elijah who it was prophesied would return before the Messiah. Jesus later said John the Baptist was he, Elijah.

John’s baptism marked a person as one of God’s chosen. Someone who was leaving behind the sins of the past and making a fresh start. Someone who was committed to welcoming the coming Messiah.

So the question becomes, if Jesus was sinless, why did he get baptized? Why would he need to repent and be forgiven? The short answer is that he didn’t.

The long answer is that he did it because of the Incarnation. The most basic reality of our faith is the Incarnation. That God entered our world in the flesh of human existence through his Son Jesus. Being human meant that he wanted to be identified with all of humanity. The Incarnation and this act of baptism means that Jesus associated himself with everything. Even our sinfulness and need for repentance.

And I absolutely love what happens as he is baptized. It says that the heavens opened up, the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove and God’s voice spoke out and said “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.” Talk about a mark, you can’t miss this one!

IV – MARKED FOR LIFE:

One of the images of Baptism in the United Methodist Church is that the waters are blessed and wash away our sins. It’s in our liturgy because we are all marked by sin. We all have some dirty

marks on us because of things we've said, thought, or done. The very way we live can bring us these marks. But Jesus makes it possible to erase these marks and be marked in a new way.

In the church we say that Baptism is an outward sign of an inward grace. As an adult, when you are baptized, you are telling all those who are watching that you have found the Messiah. You have accepted Jesus to be your Lord and Savior, and you have claimed the forgiveness he brought you as he died on the cross. You acknowledge that he is working in your life and you have made a commitment to follow him. You are being washed clean in the waters of baptism, doing away with the marks of sin, and claiming instead the mark of Jesus. You are erasing the mark of death and proclaiming you are 'MARKED FOR LIFE.'" A mark that is eternal.

When we baptize an infant we are proclaiming the same thing. That we know they were marked for death from birth due to the brokenness of creation (Adam & Eve) but you want them to be released from this curse, you want that mark erased and you want to ask God to begin working in their lives immediately and be marked for life instead. We all take an oath to help them along this path so their mark stays fresh and vivid. Then on Confirmation they confirm this mark for themselves.

I like to imagine that at every baptism we do, God proclaims that this is his beloved child who brings him great joy.

V – KEEP YOUR MARK FRESH:

I pray that you have all been marked for life in the name of Jesus Christ. If you haven't Pastor Becky or I either one would be happy to talk to you about it and get you marked.

For those of us who have been marked we need to remember that just like a tattoo can do with age our marks can grow pale, can sag, can stop looking like the original mark. That's when we need to put some life back into our mark. To make sure we remember whose mark it truly is...JESUS. We need to remember the commitment we made to follow him, to live the way he taught us, and to shine his light to everyone we meet. We need to keep our marks vivid until we meet the one who marked us someday.

AMEN

