

Sermon delivered at Trinity Episcopal church, Bend on July 13, 2024 by Deby Welch

2 Sam 6:1-5,12b-19

Eph. 1:3-14

Mark 6:14-29

Be thou my vision, and thou my true word.

Let's step back a little earlier in the gospel of Mark. You may have forgotten how Mark begins his account of the life of Jesus since it was read last December during advent, but it doesn't start with angel proclamations, Mary and Joseph or even shepherds and wise men. Mark starts with a prophesy.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;

The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,'"

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins...He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mk. 1:2-5, 7-8)

After this introduction to, we hear of Jesus being baptized by John. Jesus sees the Spirit descending on him and hears "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Mk. 1:11) Right at the beginning of Mark's gospel we know two things. We see John is preparing the way for Jesus and that Jesus knows who he is, the Son of God. The rest of the gospel tells about Jesus' calling of the twelve and his teaching and ministry with his apostles. He shares the knowledge of who he is with others although they often don't understand. He shares that he has authority to forgive sins and that he is Lord of the Sabbath, spirits and demons call him the Son of God. He teaches, heals the sick, and raises a child who was dead. As Jesus gets closer to his death, he more frequently talks about the suffering, death and resurrection of the Son of Man. But he knows who he is through all of this.

Do we know who we are? Have you ever asked what name you would give yourself if you could choose? I was born Deborah Lynn Falconer and I didn't hate my name. Deborah is actually a strong female figure in the Old Testament. But I once thought if I decided to change my name, I would call myself Batya Grace. That means daughter of God by grace. I never changed my name legally, but I still cherish this name in my heart because it tells me who and whose I am. It grounds me in my self and gives me worth.

Today we are in chapter 6 of Mark's gospel with the story of John's death. It begins "King Herod heard of Jesus and his disciples, for Jesus' name had become known." (v.14) We heard in last week's gospel that Jesus sent out the twelve two by two to preach, heal, and cast out demons. (Mk.6: 7-13) The word has gotten out. People are trying to figure out who Jesus is. There are several theories going around: John the Baptist raised from the dead, Elijah, other prophets. But Herod is certain Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead.

I have to wonder how Herod felt about the idea that John was alive again since he had caused John's death. John had criticized Herod for his second marriage to his brother's wife, but Herod recognized John as a "righteous and holy man." (v.19) Herod seems to have had mixed feelings about John and his message. Although Herod had arrested John, he also protected him—that was until he was faced with a choice: losing his honor by going against his word, or killing John. He chose saving face over John's life, but perhaps that isn't such an unusual thing. For if no one could trust his word, how could he rule? How many choices do people make to retain power and cause suffering to others?

So I ask myself, did Herod really believe John was alive again? Or did he perhaps recognize the message John brought was continuing with Jesus and his disciples? Whether or not Herod truly believed Jesus was John raised from the dead, he must have recognized the similarities between the two. They were righteous and holy, preaching to the people, gathering people to themselves, proclaiming truth to power.

After we hear of John the Baptist's death, the next verse says "The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught." (v. 30) At this point the apostles are still not sure who Jesus is, or what it is all about, but they are beginning to understand the ministry, the teaching, the doing, the

journey that Jesus is living with them. Jesus continues to explain to the disciples who he is and what the plan is and eventually, in chapter 8, he asks them “who do people say that I am?” They gave the same responses we heard today: John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets. When Jesus asks the question, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter responds “You are the Messiah.” (Mk. 8:27-29) They are finally getting to the truth of it all.

When I was in college, I read the book In His Steps by Charles Sheldon, which asked the question “What would Jesus do?” It became a bit of a “thing” for awhile, but it really is a good question. Following Jesus means doing what he did, loving those he loved, teaching others, bringing life out of death and joy out of sorrow.

We all are invited to answer the question of who is Jesus and who are we. Have we joined Jesus in the ministry and journey he undertook so many years ago? One that started with John’s proclamations, was displayed in Jesus’ word and ministry, and continued with the twelve and then the countless Christians who followed? Is Jesus someone whose words resonate in our hearts? Who calls us to be more holy and righteous? Who is worthy of being followed in word and deed? Have we chosen the name of disciple? I can only hope that I choose well in my life, that I recognize Christ in myself and others. That I can bring God’s grace and blessing to all I meet on my journey in this life. That I can ask, “What would Jesus do?” and then do it.

My husband and I have enjoyed a daily calendar that has church signs for each day. Recently one said: “It’s not how much Scripture you know, it’s how much Scripture you live.” Being a Christian is more than just believing the things we read. It means joining the journey, being a participant. I invite you to live a life of discipleship in all you do and say.

Amen.