

How do you come up out of your baptism from Lent and begin to proclaim the Good News?

The Gospel reading for this first Sunday of Lent gives us the opportunity to look at the beginning of the Christian journey from baptism with a revisit to the baptism of Jesus through Mark's eyes. Mark, being the Gospel writer of the fewest words, flies through his description of Jesus' baptism, his temptation by Satan and the launching of his ministry after the arrest of John the Baptist. Opening these six verses just a little to look inside, we find a pattern of a beginning and perhaps a proscriptio for the renewal of our Christian life which is to submit, emerge, grapple and proclaim.

Although proclaimed by Mark at the opening of his Gospel as 'the Son of God', Jesus stood in the Jordan River to be baptized by John for 'repentance and the forgiveness of sins'. Why would the Son of God need to repent and be forgiven? I think Jesus' submission to God through baptism was a rededication for us to follow *only* God, and not follow those things that tempt us to turn away from God. Jesus' baptism has come to mean this and much more for us as Christians, but for Jesus, it, also, meant not worshiping the Romans' god, the Emperor, who was held up as the Lord and Savior. And, it meant that Jesus, John and their disciples would not follow the Jewish leaders of the Temple who had submitted to the laws of the Roman Empire - laws that had taken away ancestral land through taxation, leaving much of the populace in dire poverty and sickness of body and soul. These two, who had been chosen by God as messenger and Messiah, had rededicated themselves to their religion as it had been given to them by God. Baptism for them was not just an act of faith, but was a political statement making formal the proclamation of the sovereignty of God, which they bore out in their ministries and for which they died.

At Jesus' baptism Mark tells us that God is pleased with Jesus' act of rededication. That God reveals God's nearness to Jesus by tearing open the heavens above his baptism, and anointing him with the Holy Spirit. The beauty of Jesus' baptism is Jesus,

fully human, standing in a place of transcendence, holding it open for each one of us to experience this same nearness to God and the anointing from God in our own baptisms. This divine-human interaction wasn't just for Jesus, but is for all of us who dedicate and rededicate our lives to following only God.

After his baptism, Jesus emerges from the water, and follows the Holy Spirit into the wilderness, a retreat of forty days to grapple with how to make sense of being anointed by God and live into his anointing in a world that worshiped someone other than God. During Lent, we try grapple with how we live into our baptism. We try 'to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; to seek and serve Christ in all persons loving our neighbors as ourselves; and, to strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being'. (BCP 305) Sometimes with the way life seems to be defined by the chaos of the world, many don't know why we would want to commit ourselves to such things. In fact, when we are living into our baptism, following only God through Jesus Christ, we may find *ourselves* making statements that seem political, indeed, even in protest with some of the things that are going on in the world around us as did Jesus in his time.

In the spirit of Black History month, a parishioner shared with me and others a website (mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu) of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech to the Montgomery Improvement Association of Montgomery, AL on December 5, 1955. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was addressing the MIA after its one-day boycott of riding public buses in Montgomery. The boycott rose from earlier protests by African American citizens of Montgomery who were tired of being fearful of not following demeaning and ambiguous laws for riding public buses. These laws included a requirement for African Americans to give up their seats to white riders in the section of the bus that was designated for African Americans when seats were no longer available in the section designated for white riders only. The African American citizens decided not to ride the buses until these laws were changed. Although earlier protests had been lodged with the city government, what sparked the boycott was the conviction earlier that day of Mrs.

Rosa Parks. Mrs. Parks had been found guilty of creating a public disturbance a week before for her refusal to give her seat to a white person in the ‘colored’ section of the bus when there were no more seats in the ‘white’ section of the bus. Rosa Parks’ arrest and conviction sparked a call for the MIA to *continue* the boycott of riding Montgomery city buses. This boycott would last until the Supreme Court ruled the following November that racial segregation on public buses was unconstitutional. Mrs. Parks has been named the ‘mother of the Civil Rights movement’. The image of mother implies a birth, a beginning, a baptism.

It was not hard for me to see the parallels between this meeting of the MIA in 1955, its decision to boycott riding buses and Mark’s depiction of Jesus’ baptism, his struggle to make meaning of it, and how to move forward. Mrs. Parks’ action can be seen as a baptism of repentance from following rules that were not righteous. The MIA accepted the forgiveness offered by God if they were not right in with their decision to no longer cooperate with rules that were against African Americans. They, like Jesus of Nazareth, decided to go only with God, and against the laws that demeaned them. In his speech to the MIA, Dr. King encouraged them to remember that God not only loved them, but that God stood before power. Dr. King led them through making meaning of the wilderness of having submerged themselves in rededication to God through their boycott, and how they were going to be faithful to the righteousness that God offered to all people, even in a world that didn’t recognize that righteousness for them.

Although this is a story of noble actions by a noble people, we are no less noble in our meaning-making of our baptisms during Lent. Mark’s Jesus personified this for us, creating that liminal space for us to be in divine relationship with God through our baptisms. I feel we must ask ourselves how we will rededicate ourselves, to allow the Holy Spirit to descend upon us, discern through prayer with us and push us out into the world renewed, to live into God’s love? Echoing words from Deacon Carenda’s moving sermons, how will we allow God to break into our lives so we can break out of old ways? Ways that cause us to give into the dirt of the world that turns us away from God.

Will you emerge at the end of your wilderness of Lent at the same point at which you entered, still trying to find meaning for the parts of your life that don't quite measure up to your baptismal vows? Or, will you have allowed God to grapple with you as you try to live into your baptism, so that you emerge with new meaning, with a new understanding of what it means to be alive and well in the love of God. For this is where we want to be at the end of this Lent. Living into the full meaning of God's love for our lives. The bus boycott in Montgomery, AL 60 years ago was a proclamation of the good news of God's righteousness that the MIA shared with the world. And, when they began riding on the front seats of buses, they began living fully as God's love had intended for them to live. We each have our own good news to share of God's love just as Jesus did when he emerged from the wilderness. I pray that from this first Sunday of Lent, we can rededicate ourselves to only God and start anew to make-meaning of God's love for us so that we, too, can proclaim the good news through our baptisms. Amen.