

Baptism Sermon

Mark 1: 21-28, and 1 Corinthians 8

What a blessing to come together today to welcome baby Dawson into the family of God here at Whitehorse United. When I looked at the texts given for today, it seemed to me thatthey're not the texts I would have chosen for a baptism sermon

but the more I looked at them....

they're not bad!

The question I started with was: what kind of church is Dawson being welcomed into? And what can these Bible readings do to help us answer that question? What kind of church is this; why as parents, would you want your child to be part of it, and can these readings help us answer that.

I usually focus on just one of the readings but today I'm going to look more briefly at two of them, and I'm going to start with some background. Bear with me please, because I hope that the historical information will bring us to a place where we can discern the living Word of God.

So – let's begin with Mark. (this year, until next Advent, Mark is the gospel we'll be focusing on) I'm going to start RIGHT at the beginning.

After Jesus lived and died and was raised, many of his followers believed that he was going to return, in bodily form, and that he would do so soon; certainly within their lifetimes. Nothing was written down, because they all remembered and passed on what they knew about Jesus of Nazareth. They never dreamed that so much time would pass that there would be people, new followers, who had never known Jesus, and that there would be another generation. As time did pass, though, and some of them began to die off, they thought: “maybe we'd better write this down” and that's when the gospels were written. There were lots of Gospels....of them, we have four.

And of those, Mark was the first written.

It was written around the year 65; that is, roughly 30 years after Jesus' death.

It's the shortest of the four, 16 chapters, almost half of which deal with the last week of Jesus' life.

There is no report of Jesus' birth – nothing. It begins with Jesus as a full grown man, at the Jordan being baptized by John.

Just quickly: roughly 10 years later, Mt and Lk each with a copy of Mk in front of them, but in different parts of the Empire, wrote their own. They copied, added, corrected,

together they are called the synoptics, because they depend on one another. (“syn” means together)

John, about 10 years after that, is written as far as we know, without literary reference to the others.

Why is that important?

And how does it answer the question “what kind of church are we welcoming Dawson into?”

Well, when you look at the 4 gospels we have (even if we didn't know there are others, and who KNOWS what archaeologists will discover in the future) but even if you look at Mt, Mk, Lk and Jn, what you have is, side by side portraits of Jesus of Nazareth. They aren't the same – at all. Read them. When you get used to them you can tell their styles, and their emphases. They each tell the story of Jesus of Nazareth, but they have different slants, sometimes the details differ, ...and they present those side by side, without explanation, without apology. Each of those writers experienced God in Jesus. Each of those writers wants passionately for us to experience that too. And each experienced it, and tells it, in his own way.

So: Dawson, as you grow and learn about yourself and your Creator...as you learn about Jesus and learn to be his follower, we want you to know that you are part of a church where there is room for difference and where there is diversity of faith, and where that's how it is supposed to be. You will have freedom to experience the wonder of God's love in Jesus in your own way and we will be here for you to help you and share ourselves and our faith with you.

How do I know? The Bible tells me so.

Let's turn to the Corinthians reading now. That seems quite far removed from our experience doesn't it? It's about food sacrificed to idols.

Here's some background: we're talking about Corinth here. Corinth was a port city, a BIG port city....sort of like New York I think. People from all over the known world were there; cosmopolitan – every religion, every culture, every language....you can imagine that.

That's great.

However, for Jews, there were some issues. Jewish food laws were very strict. What were they do you remember? Meat could be eaten if the animal had..... and fish could be eaten only if.....

and there were other rules as well. Here's how it played out in the church. Once the church began to grow, there were converts from everywhere. Not all were Jews, and so not all kept food laws. The question was: if you were a Jew and you became a Christian, did you still keep kosher? And if you were NOT a Jew and became a Christian, did you have to keep Jewish laws? So as that conversation was happening in all local churches you can imagine how it was in Corinth.

AND, we understand they celebrated communion with a full meal. Potluck no less.

Can you picture it? Like...after church today....we all go downstairs, there's food. Who made it? What is it? Is it ok to eat? And if we were in 1st Century Corinth, the question would be where did it come from, because there were all kinds of religions, they all sacrificed animals to their gods, and the leftover meat was often sold in the markets.

Some believed that you should never eat meat that had been sacrificed to other gods. It was like betraying the one true God. Other said....there IS no other God but God, the “other gods” are idols, arenothing....since there's only one God so ...it's like eating meat that's been offered to nothing so what's your problem...

and the conversation/arguments went on.

Paul, though, takes the discussion to another place. And that's the force of this passage.

Essentially I understand him to be saying it's NOT ABOUT whether or not you are right or wrong about this at some theoretical level. Of course there is no God but God and of course eating meat sacrificed to nothing is acceptable. But that's not the question. The question is about relationships.

Sometimes doing what you have a perfect right to do is not the right thing because it hurts someone else.

That's all. He's saying that the church is a place where relationships with one another trump doctrine and trump theology and trump theory.

We are a church where we take one another seriously and when I'm doing something that hurts you, even if I am "right" and even if I have a perfect right to do it, if it is hurting you then that comes first.

Does that make sense?

So Dawson, that's the kind of church you're welcomed into today. A place where everyone is important, and everyone's needs are taken into consideration even if they conflict with my own. A place where you can learn and grow and when you need something we will try our best to take you seriously and honour you and encourage you to do the same for others.

Finally I want to go back to the Gospel lesson: Jesus teaches with authority, and his voice is stronger and more powerful than anything. And those who listen are left astonished and amazed, saying "Who IS this?"

I pray that we can be for you Dawson, and for everyone who comes to us, a place where you can encounter this man – learn about him, meet him and be left breathless and in wonder.

Amen