

Sunday, Jan. 10, 2021
Mark 1:1-11

Trinity Lutheran Church – Herkimer
Sermon by Rev. Edwina Landry

Breaking and Entering

Breaking News. Those words across the television and the airways always elicit a foreboding fear for most of us, don't they? We wonder what terrible news will follow. This week has been a painful week for Americans and those across the world as we watched the horrific events unfold in Washington D.C. It's been a difficult week as Christian pastors prepare to speak God's voice to congregations today, aware they may be criticized- or worse - for being too "political." Clergy have been tossed from congregations over this, but then, Jesus lost his life over this as well. God's message proclaimed in Jesus' ministry was not partisan, but it was political. It was that breaking news that Jesus proclaimed that got him in trouble and cost him his life. But he had to speak God's word into being to all who would hear because that breaking news of God's love and mercy and justice had to be proclaimed.

And so after Jesus' death and resurrection, the gospel writer, Mark, continued to proclaim that breaking news. There was an urgency in Mark's message like the urgency of news reporters today. Mark begins his gospel report with an indictment. The charge is breaking and entering. He proclaims that a powerful force – God - has broken into the world in the person of Jesus. The lives of the everyday people of the ancient Middle East would never be the same.

The day started out like many other days. John the Baptist was baptizing people in the Jordan river, the same river that many of their ancestors crossed after having wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. It was near here on the Jabbok River, a tributary of the Jordan, that Jacob wrestled with God all night. It was here that the prophets Elijah and Elisha carried out much of their ministry.

It was then in the same Jordan river that Jesus was baptized by John. Why then was this such an extraordinary event?

Because unlike other baptisms, Mark says as Jesus was “coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart, and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.” Let me repeat that; he saw the heavens torn apart! And the Holy Spirit descended from that and entered into Jesus. It didn’t just gently rest on him. It dive-bombed right out of the heavens that were torn apart and landed into Jesus. And the voice of God announcing to Jesus, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” That was indeed breaking news!

I wonder what Jesus felt at that exact moment. Was he taken by surprise? Was he a little afraid? Was he elated, and filled with joy? Was he speechless at the moment when he was able to see heaven and earth all at the same time and this Holy Spirit coming right at him and in him? The Creator of the universe was speaking and acting and breaking into the world. At that pivotal moment God, and Jesus, and the Holy Spirit were one. Wow! Close your eyes: take it in. The powerful voice and breath of God breaking into the world through Jesus in this single act of baptism!

Baptism then, is not just an ordinary event or ritual of water and words. Baptism is the moment – where the power of the voice of God and the breath of the Holy Spirit break into the world as they did at the beginning of creation and create new life again. Now, you might say, “That didn’t happen at my baptism!” But I’m here to tell you it did! The Spirit of God entered into you too. God’s voice proclaimed, “You are my son, my daughter, the beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Maybe you didn’t hear it. Maybe we as clergy have failed to help you hear that. And that’s tragic because if you don’t know you and every person are beloved, then how can you live out your holy calling as Christians to love all people as Christ loves?

My good friend Chad whom I went to seminary with is now a pastor serving a congregation in Florida. He shared this, this week after the breaking news of what happened in D.C. this week, “I could only come to one painful conclusion...the church has failed. Those words were hard to type and

are even harder to say. The church has failed. And for a nation that proudly claims to be a Christian nation...we surely don't act like it." He continues, "This is where I get into trouble...because our sense of patriotism gets offended. But why isn't our sense of Christianity more offended?"

Pastor Chad brings up a very good point. Why isn't our sense of Christianity more offended? Because, you see, baptism changes everything. When Jesus was baptized and the Holy Spirit entered into him it then immediately drove him into the wilderness where he would be tempted by Satan. And Jesus needed the strength of God's Holy Spirit overcome the temptations of Satan. Jesus needed God's Holy Spirit to give him the wisdom not to fall for Satan's lies. Jesus needed God's Holy Spirit to give him the courage to speak truth to the false power Satan was trying to claim.

Jesus needed God's Holy Spirit to resist doing what was best for him, and living a life that would save the entire world. We were baptized into that same Holy Spirit infused baptism too. That's why in our baptism we say that we "reject the devil and all his empty promises." We are following Jesus' example. And so, when we see people with signs that say, "Jesus saves" while trampling on the rights -and bodies - of others, while speaking words of racism and hatred, while building guillotines, we *must* be offended. When we see people proudly wearing clothes that say 6MWNE (meaning 6 million Jews were not enough!- referring to the Holocaust), we *must* be offended. When we treat people of color, those of the LGBTQ community, those who think or believe differently than us with disdain and cruelty we *must* be offended by our actions. This is not how Jesus saves! This is not the Christianity that Jesus calls us to live! Christian Nationalism is not Christianity at all. If we are truly Jesus' disciples, then as Christians we must love as Jesus did and that kind of Divine love means speaking out and standing up to evil whenever it tempts us to do nothing. That kind of Divine love holds ourselves and others accountable to be the loving people God calls us to be. Jesus didn't just ignore the injustices of his time, and neither can we.

The actions we saw on the news are not just those of a group far away. People all around us think and act this way every day- perhaps even at times ourselves - and by choosing to ignore these and

similar statements or actions, we choose to let the hatred grow. It starts small with remarks we let slip by or small actions that we turn a blind eye to. We must be willing to acknowledge and see our sins, confess them, and repent- turn around and walk in love. Our baptism – the baptism into Christ – calls us to be different. Christ calls us to think of others and not just ourselves. Jesus said all people are our neighbors, our brothers and sisters. God said to Jesus, and to us, you are my Beloved; you are now called to *be* different, to *act* different, and the Holy Spirit will give you the power and the courage to do that.

That is the good news of the gospel. *That* is the breaking news of the gospel. God has broken into the world. The voice of God's truth still speaks. The power of God's Spirit is still moving to create a loving and just world. The Light of God still illuminates the darkness. The good news of the gospel is that the same wind of the Holy Spirit that hovered over the waters at the beginning of creation is still breathing new life into the dark and void corners of our lives. Creation is still taking place and new life still can emerge out of the darkness. God's Spirit tears apart hardened hearts and ushers in compassion. God's Spirit takes chaos and replaces it with understanding. God's Spirit hovers over the darkness of sin and equips us with the power of love to join with God in co-creating the beloved community that God desires. We have the power of the Holy Spirit to be bold and courageous, loving and kind, compassionate and merciful, and continue to work toward revealing the kingdom of God, the beloved community of God where all people are loved and valued and justice for all prevails.

There may be times our hearts are breaking, when we are weary and want to just give up hope or just give up. Living like Jesus, being Christ in the world, can at times be exhausting. That's why Jesus went away a lot by himself to pray and recharge, and we can learn from him. There may be times we feel all is being torn apart at the seams, but remember that the heavens have been torn apart, and God has entered this world through Jesus. And because of Jesus, nothing, nothing will tear us apart from God again. That is breaking news to report that will change the world with the love of God!

Let us pray.....Gracious God, in this season of Epiphany, reveal to us your Holy Spirit. Send your Holy Spirit to awaken in us the gifts of discipleship. Renew in us the promises made in our baptism: to live among God's faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, to strive for justice and peace in all the earth. And let all God's people say Amen.

Amen!