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Baptism of the Lord, Year B

*The Ten Things They
Don't Teach You in Seminary*

Mark 1:4-11
Psalm 29
Mechanicsburg Presbyterian Church

As we continue to experience The Word of the Lord together, let us pray. Great Parent, Loving God, Great concerned and involved Lord, open up our hearts and our minds and stir up within us your Spirit, so that we might grow in faith and serve you with our whole hearts and minds. If these words are not your Word, may they be forgotten and come to naught, but if they be thy Word, may they adhere to our hearts, forever transforming us from glory into glory, into the creatures you would have us be, thou who art our rock and our redeemer, Amen.

Psalm 29

*Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;
worship the LORD in holy splendour.*

*The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over mighty waters.
The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.*

*The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,*

*and Sirion like a young wild ox.
The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of
fire.
The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.*

*The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl,
and strips the forest bare;
and in his temple all say, 'Glory!'*

*The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king for ever.
May the LORD give strength to his people!
May the LORD bless his people with peace!*

11am - I want to clear up a couple of things for those of you who have heard me speak here before. First, from now on we will be closely screening all Consecration Sunday speakers. And second, for those of you who were present for Myrtle's installation – if the vote goes well here today and the way be clear – there will be no trade for Myrtle. She stays too.

However, we did leave room in the contract for a player to be named later so...

Mark 1:4-11

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. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 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.'

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

The grass withers, the flower fades but the Word of our Lord stands forever... Thanks be to God.

There's nothing like coming to church on a day that promises already be a little bit longer than usual and checking out the sermon title you realize you've got not 3, not 5 but TEN points that are supposedly going to be hit in the sermon.

I have good news for you because #10 on the list of things that they don't teach you in seminary is: **The number of points you have in a sermon must correlate with the number of fingers you have on your hand.**

Therefore we are already down to 9. And that was it.

#8 – Folks should 'friend' you first.

There are some of you out there who know exactly what I mean. For those of you who don't – there is a program that you can do on your computer that uses the internet to keep people in touch. It is called Facebook. Everyone on Facebook has an account with their picture on it. In order for people to see what is on your account, they need to be your 'friend'.

I am literally telling people right here and now that I very much want to friend them but they will need to reach out to me first. This way the pastor at your church is only intruding on your internet space if you invite her rather than you feeling as if you have no choice.

I am also now telling all of you right here and now that I very much want to friend you in the real world too but sometimes you will need to reach out to me first. If I am not coming to your event or program and you think I should – tell me. If you would like me more involved in what you are doing – invite me.

Our original intent was to immediately have folks into our home, but right now our home is a lovely piece of property with bi-level dirt. It is very cold. It is very wet... and I was going to complain but apparently since there is no roof or walls... warm and dry is a bit too high of an expectation.

So in the meantime I will do my best to get around and to meet with you and to hear your stories and be with you... but if you don't feel like I am 'friending' you, by all means – friend me first.

#7 – Passing ordination exams is good for your career... but co-mvp of the seminary flag football league lasts forever.

There's no moral of the story here, I just wanted you to know that.

#6 - Don't tick off the music program.

I don't think any more needs to be said about that.

#5 – Grab the joy.

Today is, liturgically speaking, Baptism of the Lord Sunday. It is a wonderful morning to be preaching a candidating sermon because the texts are alive and deep and rich and powerful. I don't mean to take anything away from Ordinary Time Scripture readings from Leviticus but these high holy days of Advent and Christmas and Epiphany and the Lord's Baptism offer us an opportunity to clamor to the top of the mountain and to soar!

The Psalmist writes:

*Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;
worship the LORD in holy splendour.*

Grab the joy!

The Gospel writer of Mark is *always* in a hurry. His book is only 16 chapters long – John is at 21, Luke has 24 and I’m pretty sure they had to take Matthew’s scribe away so he would stop at 27. Mark has 16 chapters – that’s it! So when he highlights something it’s up to us to take notice and grab it!

He kicks right in with John the Baptizer – not as Elizabeth’s child but as a prophet, linking the Old and the New. Only eight verses into his book and Jesus the adult is walking down to the Jordan to be baptized.

Heaven tore open!

The spirit came upon him!

And the Lord spoke to him!

Then quick as a flash Mark has him in the desert being tempted for TWO verses then – only 14 verses into the book – he’s choosing his disciples and embarking on his day to day ministry.

This is not to say that the day to day ministry of Jesus was not interesting and exciting, but it’s not exactly the heavens tearing and the spirit of the Lord ‘dive-bombing’ his head either.

We spend the majority of our time in the Ordinary. We are all on the cusp of it right now. We also walk through Lent. So when we have these opportunities to taste, to see and to hear the glory of the Lord – to feel the joy – it is up to us to grab them!

Grab the joy.

#4 – There are uncomfortable ramifications when we invite the Holy Spirit to invade our lives.

The invitation to the Holy Spirit was given. I know that this presbytery has been praying. I know that this congregation has been praying. I know that the Pastor Nominating Committee has been praying... and look at the ramifications!

What happened?! Was the Minister Store all out of balding, white guys?

Don’t blame me. When I was growing up I wanted to be Reggie Jackson! Looks like God has God’s own plans for all of us...

And God is good. **All the time.**

All the time. **God is good.**

This next lesson I learned as I sat on a counselor’s couch with my husband on one end and me on the other. In my hands were a letter written by him that discounted our past and ended our future. I turned to the counselor and declared, “I believe in fighting for a marriage to the death.”

To which he responded with **#3** on our list today:
It takes two to be in a relationship and only one to destroy it.

We are well past that now. I am fine. Will is thriving. And we are on the cusp of a relationship with the one I was afraid had gotten away - you.

I am 'all in' on this commitment with Mechanicsburg Presbyterian Church. And I hope you are too.

I don't just mean by checking 'yes' on the ballot.

By 'all in' I mean coming to worship.

Bringing your friends.

Engaging in the programs.

Participating in mission.

Supporting your staff.

By 'all in' I mean stewardship.

Where is your heart?

Your time?

Your talent?

Where are the things that God first gave unto you?

I am all in on this commitment – All. In.

Are you?

1 & #2 – We are beloved children of God who are bound to one another through our Baptism.

Certainly they teach us this in seminary. But the way I have lived it far exceeds the bounds of what the *Book of Order* can define. I was raised in a church similar to this one. Believe me, it took a committee. Babyfold, nursery school, kid's choirs and clubs, Sunday School, youth group – I was there.

And even though when I go back and visit some of my old Sunday school teachers still do not believe me when I tell them I am now a minister – those folks who said 'I do' when asked if they would help nurture me in the Christian faith – are still doing it.

My parents.

Their peers.

My peers.

So many folks – praying, cheering, embracing.

According to the *Book of Order* baptism signifies the faithfulness of God, the washing away of sin, rebirth, putting on the fresh garment of Christ, being sealed by God's Spirit, resurrection and illumination in Christ... and adoption into the covenant family of the Church¹.

It is this last piece that fits significantly into the puzzle of why the sinless son of God came down to the Jordan to be baptized.

Think about it. If Jesus never sinned, then why was it necessary for him to be baptized? Why does he voluntarily join the ranks of penitent sinner?

One reason is because it is a common bond shared by a specific community of faith... *our* community of faith. And not 'community' as defined by these four walls but community as defined by three – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I am not leaving one community of faith to join another. The vows that congregation took to guide, love, encourage and pray for my son at his baptism do not stop midway down the Carlisle Pike. They are your vow too... and I expect you to abide by it just as I will for you.

And so there are our nine; some silly, some sound and some in between.

Our Scripture today reminds us that we are involved with a powerful God. The Psalmist speaks of a violent storm, the Gospel tells of heavens tearing and voices booming. Our own baptisms rarely come with such accompaniment but the warning found in Hebrews remains true: *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*ⁱⁱ.

I'm all in.
Are you?

In the Name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ⁱ W-2.3004.

ⁱⁱ Hebrews 10:31