

TEXT: Mark 1:9-15

TOPIC: Jesus leaves home, gets baptized by John then forced to the wilderness by the Spirit, and starts ministry.

SUBJECT: Jesus' hero's journey isn't for Jesus alone, but for everyone who chooses their own hero's journey.

TITLE: The Journey of Baptism

I have a confession to make.

I was baptized when I was about two months old, I think, so I don't remember my baptism. Did you hear that? I don't remember my baptism.

I think my parents once told me that Rev. George Wheat baptized me, but I don't remember my baptism. I've even seen my baptismal certificate, but I don't remember my baptism.

And that's OK. It doesn't matter if you remember your baptism or not. What matters is living out your baptism, and living out the journey of your baptism God intends for you. Each of us lives out the journey of baptism in all its glory and all of its brokenness, and throughout all of it there may be certain consistencies, just like there were for Jesus. We'll explore those today, but first let's pray.

PRAYER

Years ago, I remember learning about Joseph Campbell's work on the "hero's journey." When I learned about it, it was in the context of Luke Skywalker and Star Wars, and how the journey requires that the hero leave home and embark on an adventure.

The description the writer of Mark's gospel gives of Jesus' journey from Nazareth in Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by his cousin, John, and then taken by the Spirit into the wilderness feels every bit like the hero's journey. Not only does Jesus leave home, but what's intriguing is that once Jesus comes up out of the water, Jesus sees the Spirit come to him like a dove, only to hear a voice from heaven that declares, "You are my son, whom I dearly

love; in you I find happiness.” From that instant, Jesus is *forced* by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted.

Did you notice that? Jesus is forced into the wilderness by the Spirit. Not by the tempter, but by the Spirit. Jesus is forced by the same Spirit that landed on him like a dove in the verse just prior. From the moment of his baptism, Jesus is forced to take a second journey. Jesus’ second journey is his baptism journey; it’s not like the baptism journey I know I took in my late teens and 20’s, where I didn’t manage the wilderness as well as Jesus did.

Think of this in terms of any wilderness places you felt yourself taken into. Most of us probably didn’t choose those journeys, but life, circumstances, difficulties, challenges, or something took us on them. Maybe this indicates how the Spirit doesn’t just take Jesus into those places of testing, temptation and purification. Instead, the Spirit forces us to take those journeys as part of the baptism we share with Christ; whether we rely on the angels to guide us or the temptations to disrupt our relationship with God says something about how we travel the journey.

On the journey of baptism, I don’t think any of us choose anything that accompanies the journey; challenges happen, and faith sees us through. Even if most of the challenges right in front of us right now are challenges of our own making, rarely do we seek the hardships they sometimes bring, but it is the hardships of the baptismal journey that act as a refiner’s fire, which takes a lump of coal and makes it into a fine diamond.

And that suggests a few things. It suggests that every hardship we experience in life brings with it an opportunity to say “I am responsible for this and I am responsible for not listening or not paying attention to the words spoken not just to Jesus at Jesus’ baptism but the

words that were spoken at the baptism I may or may not remember: “This is my child. I love him; I love her. There’s happiness in you – look for it.” God constantly looks at us and says, “this is my child, whom I love” even when life gets tough. God looks us and says, “This is my child I love you, and I am with you always.”

So, maybe the hero’s journey doesn’t belong to Jesus alone. Maybe the hero’s journey is the journey of baptism God blesses us with, particularly during the Lenten seasons of our lives when we are in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights, arrested by the thought that we’re not alone and we never have been. During his time in the wilderness, Jesus was among the wild animals, tested by spiritual forces of wickedness. That meant Jesus was facing grave dangers but the entire time in the wilderness, Jesus was not only protected, but any time people commune with the angels in the wilderness, it signals that the realm of God is at hand.

You see, none of us face the wilderness alone even when it feels like we’re there alone. It seems to me, then, that one of the challenges of the spiritual life for us is to actually open our hearts, souls, minds, and lives to the presence which surrounds us with love and life. Opening our hearts and souls to another human being is tough for most people to do, so opening our hearts, souls, minds, and lives to the invisible, immortal God can feel almost incompressible.

Yet that is what we are called to do because the “time has come. The kin-dom of God has come near; repent, and believe the good news.” In those words, Jesus is calling people to open themselves to the presence of God, who is constantly moving among us, setting right whatever has gone wrong, healing the wounded and mending broken hearts. In those words, Jesus is calling us to the journey of our baptism.

The journey of baptism is a journey to experience the healing and loving presence of God by first facing the hard realities of things like racism, sexism, classism, and addictions that resist God's plan for us to experience love and restorative justice.

The journey of baptism is a journey that replaces selfishness with selflessness since selfishness only facilitates brokenness.

The journey of baptism isn't something that just automatically happens; it's a journey rather than a one-time experience.

The journey of baptism doesn't happen just over 40 days in the wilderness. The journey of baptism is a pilgrimage we take our entire lives, but it's a pilgrimage where we realize God and God's representatives are with us the entire time.

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.