

First Sunday After Epiphany

January 11, 2009

Scripture: Psalm 29:1-4, 10-11; Mark1:4-11

Sermon: “A Wake Up Call”

When Woodrow Wilson was Governor of New Jersey, a very ambitious young civil servant called him at his home at 3:30 in the morning and woke him up. The young man urgently said, “Mr. Governor, I’m sorry to wake you up but your State Auditor has just died, and I would like to know if I can take his place.”

Mr. Wilson thought that over for a moment and then replied dryly, “Well, I guess it’s all right with me, if it’s all right with the undertaker.”¹

A wake up call. We have all received them at home or while we were travelling. Sometimes they bring us out of a deep sleep. Often they disturb a peaceful dream. Mark delivers a wake up call at the beginning of the gospel.

With the inclusion of a voice from heaven in verse eleven, Mark tells us exactly where to find God. The voice was for the benefit of the citizens of Jerusalem who had come out to the Jordan to hear John and receive a baptism for the repentance of sins. Those simple and sophisticated people were looking for God.

All around us are people who are searching for meaning. We are like those folks who journeyed out to the Jordan to encounter the prophet John and to find the presence of God. Even today, humanity continues to illustrate its’ inability to find God where God is to be found—in the Christ.

Many of you will remember that television personality Jay Leno followed John Carson on the *Tonight Show*. But how many of you remember Carson’s

¹ King Duncan, *Mule Eggs and Topknots*, (Knoxville: Seven Worlds Press, 1991), 108.

forerunner Jack Paar? Paar once got a sort of scolding from Fred Allen, a guest on the program, after the host inadvertently illustrated his own willingness—or ability—to identify God properly. On that night years ago, Paar, fawning over Allen upon his first-ever meeting with him, stammered, “You are my . . . God!” Fred Allen replied dryly, “There are 5,000 churches in New York and you have to be an atheist!”

Mark sounds the wake up call and wants us to know that God has come in human flesh in the person Jesus. The long-awaited Messiah has come to usher light into the darkness of the world. The heavens are opened and light dawns upon the Promised One who will bring salvation to the world. As Scottish theologian Matthew Black shared years ago, the words that broke from heaven as Jesus came up out of the water were words of Messianic promise from Psalm 2. Mark boldly proclaims that God’s favor rested on Jesus, the Promised One, as he began his public ministry. The scene there at the Jordan River was a sacred one. Mark “wants the world to understand that Jesus is truly the fulfillment of the prophetic promise and that his mission, as seen later through the lens of the cross, is to bring that promise to its completion through his death on the cross.”²

On February 23, 1836, the siege of the Alamo began. The mission compound containing 187 men was surrounded by 3,000 soldiers under General Santa Anna. Santa Anna, however, had given the defenders a chance to leave unharmed.

² Herbert W. Chilstrom, “Baptized for Life,” *Emphasis*, January-February, 1997, 19.

Colonel Travis, the commander of the garrison, drew a line in the dirt. The 187 men were given the opportunity to cross over the line as a sign that they would remain to defend the Alamo. Those who did not cross the line were free to go. To cross over the line meant certain death because Santa Anna had promised that no mercy would be shown those who remained. It was a moment of great decision. But within minutes every man in the Alamo had crossed the line, sealing their fate.

A moment of great decision took place long ago at the Jordan River. Jesus had to decide whether or not he would remain in the carpenter shop at Nazareth or follow the call of God to his messianic ministry. Jesus knew that following the call of God meant a date with the cross in Jerusalem. It was a wake up call for our Lord.

The voice and the water are part of the story, but Israel was being called to wake up to the reality of God's movement. John was preparing the way of the Lord. The light of God's divine promises was shining and it would take the human figure of Jesus to make sense out of it all.

The season of Epiphany is upon us. We are given a wake up call this morning. Will we allow the light, of God's loving and challenging presence, to awaken us from sleep? Will we accept the challenge to cross over the line and live and defend the "good news" of our Lord Jesus Christ? The bread and wine of salvation are before us this morning. May we answer the wake up call this morning and allow the light of God's Son to bring