

**“I’m Well-Pleased with You, Too!” Mark 1:4-11**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany January 15, 2012 Pastor Thomas Kock**

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. The Word of God for our consideration is recorded in Mark 1. (Read text.) My dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

The political season is upon us. We have candidates who are vying for various offices, and of course, the contestants who capture the most attention are those who are candidates for the presidency. Every one of them is searching for attention. Every one of them is seeking endorsements, and the bigger the endorsement, the louder it’s trumpeted.

So, how many candidates do you think would have like to have been introduced to the world by John the Baptist? ☺ Yeah, John’s clothing was, well, unique. He wore a garment made of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist. (Camel’s hair, if I understand it correctly, is supposed to be kind of rough and scratchy.) His diet was the diet of the very poor – locusts and wild honey. Can you imagine George Bush or Bill Clinton wanting to be introduced to the world by someone like John the Baptist? ☺ Yeah, it doesn’t sound real probable, does it.

But that’s how Jesus chose to be introduced to the world. It’s yet another example of how God rarely, if ever, does things in the way that we would anticipate. Think of the two Scripture readings for today. The first one is near the conclusion of the flood account. Remember how things went just before the flood. The earth had become so evil that God decided to make a fresh start, and save only Noah and his family. Now, since God is God, He has power over all life. So, what could God have done? He could have simply caused everybody to die! Right? He could have simply caused everyone to die, allowing only Noah and family to survive.

But that’s not how God did it! Instead, He had Noah build this huge boat, the ark, and gather up two of all the animals on the face of the earth. Now, I’m thinking that for Noah this would have been one huge hassle! True? Sure! Wouldn’t it have been far easier if God had just put all the other people to death and allowed Noah and family to move forward? Yeah, that would have been simple, that would have been “easy.” Instead God says, “Noah, build the ark!” Why so?

Perhaps because during the time when Noah was building the ark it gave hundreds, maybe thousands - even millions? – of people the time to be reminded of who the true God was, the opportunity to be reminded that God was God and that He wanted them to be saved. Could that be the reason why God chose to NOT simply put everyone to death, but instead to have Noah build the huge boat? Maybe so. But, I’m guessing it’s not the way we would have done it, it’s a way which is surprising to you and to me.

The New Testament reading is similar. God knew that when Paul and Silas got to Philippi that the jailer would eventually come to faith. Wouldn’t it have been simple/easy to simply have Paul and Silas meet him somewhere and tell him about Jesus? Well, that would seem to be the case to us. Instead, God allows Paul and Silas to be beaten and imprisoned, then causes an earthquake, which releases Paul and Silas from the chains. The jailer is about to kill himself, thinking that the prisoners have escaped, but Paul stops him, and at that point the jailer is ready to hear about Jesus and His love. Wow! It’s not the way you and I would have planned it out, is it? I sure doubt it. But as usual, God’s wonderful saving work was accomplished, yet in a way which is surprising to us.

And so I guess it should come as no surprise that Jesus introduces Himself to this world in a way which is completely different than what you and I would expect. He doesn’t introduce Himself to the world with fanfare and trumpets and a political rally. Rather, He allows a very simple-looking – and perhaps somewhat strange looking – man to baptize Him. Nope, not what we’d expect!

And, it should then come as no surprise to us that God works salvation in a way which is different than what we humans would expect. What does our human nature think about salvation? In fact, what does our human nature even desire when it comes to salvation? Our human nature thinks – yes, even desires – that we should get to play a role. Our human nature thinks, desires, that we should be able to earn God’s favor through our words and actions. That sinful thought is knit into each one of us; the theologians call it “the opinio legis,” which is Latin for, “the opinion of the law,” the opinion that I can earn God’s favor by doing good things.

The reality is, that idea is horribly sinful and shortsighted. Think of who God is. He’s the perfect, almighty God. Every time in the Bible that God reveals a glimpse of perfection or glory, human beings cower in fear. We think of the shepherds on Christmas Eve, or the disciples on the mount of Transfiguration, or the guards at the tomb when the angel appears. In each of those occurrences, God’s perfection caused the sinful humans to be terrified, to cower in fear.

Perhaps most instructive are Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. After they’ve taken the fruit from the tree, God comes to visit them in the Garden. And what do they do? They hide from God! In fear! If we were to ask Adam and Eve at that point if there was anything they could do in order to please God, what do you think their

answer would have been? I'm sure it would have been, "Are you kidding? We blew it completely! And now to do something to please Him? It's not going to happen! Not at all!"

And yet that's how we humans think. We think that we can/should/do please God with our actions. In reality, that idea is an insult to God, showing that we really don't understand the fullness of God's holiness nor the depth of our sinfulness. And so while in all the rest of the things of this world, "There's no free lunch," "You have to earn it every step of the way," and while those thoughts would seem logical to us to apply to salvation as well, as usual, God's way is surprising, different than what we would expect.

We see it clearly in baptism. Let's quickly review. Baptism is the way that God places His name on us, adopting us into His family. We use water, and the Word of God. Baptism is powerful not because of the water, but because the powerful Word of God is there. The Greek word "baptizō", from which the English word "baptism" is derived, simply means, "to apply water – in any manner – for cleansing." So, we can do baptisms by immersing a person, by pouring, or by sprinkling. Again, the key thing isn't how much water is used or how it's applied; rather, the key thing is the powerful Word of God, the Word which causes baptism to be powerful and effective. Because baptism is a "washing with water through the Word," (Eph 5), baptism works! It works faith in the heart. It washes sin away. It takes us from being outside of God to being "inside of" God. (That's being baptized, "into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Matthew 28:19) In short, in baptism God adopts us into His family, makes us His child. 1Peter 3:21 says it simply: "This baptism now saves you."

"But wait!" we protest, "that's too easy! That's too simple! How can baptism possibly save?!" (What arrogance we humans display, that we should question God's way of bringing salvation to us!)

The good news is, even though it's different than what we'd expect, it's exactly God's way. God's way is to do His powerful work in surprising ways. He does it all the time; He does it with baptism. Altho' it may not make sense to us, it makes perfect sense to God.

Martin Luther one time explained it this way, "If God came to you and said, 'Here is a blade of grass. With this blade of grass I give you eternal life, the forgiveness of sins, salvation,' how would you feel about that blade of grass? Wouldn't you treasure it with everything you had? Wouldn't you consider it to be the most important thing in your whole life? Of course you would! God has done just that in baptism. He has given – to YOU – the forgiveness of sins, faith, eternal life. Yes, it's a simple act; just a little bit of water sprinkled on a head, a few words spoken. But that simple act has powerful, eternal results! No, it's probably not the way we would have done it; but it's the way God chose to do it!

And so Jesus begins His public ministry by going to be baptized. And realize, Jesus didn't really even need it. After all, Jesus is perfect, He had no sins which needed to be washed away. And so why would He go to be baptized? When John the Baptist makes that exact point, Jesus explains to him, "Let it be so now to fulfill all righteousness." Remember, we needed a Savior who could not only take our sins away, but who could also provide for us the human perfection which we needed in order to get to heaven. Jesus wanted us to know that He had so completely fulfilled the law that He even went BEYOND what was necessary, as He did in this instance, so that we could know, for sure, that He had done all that was necessary for our salvation.

And God the Father and God the Spirit put their stamp of approval on it. The skies were torn open, and the Spirit descended in the form of a dove. The Father spoke, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

And can you imagine? Because of your baptism, God can say the exact same thing about you. God can say about you, "I'm well-pleased with you, too." Amen.