

Today we heard the words that Jesus proclaimed

- At the beginning of his ministry: **'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'**
- Repent: turn back to God, and believe in, trust in the Gospel
- The message of repentance is the message of John the Baptist
- And of the Apostles from Pentecost on:
- The message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins
- In Jesus' name
- It's the same message that pastors are called to proclaim today
- And that we as a church promote in our different callings

Today I'm proclaiming Good News

- In Jesus we have the gift of repentance: Because of his sacrifice
- We are free to admit that we need help from God;
- We are free to name our sins rightly trusting
- That not only will God refrain from condemning us
- But that he will welcome us, forgive us,
- And, by his Spirit, lead us in a new way of life.

Let's get in to today's reading: **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.'**

- This is at almost the very beginning of Mark's Gospel
- We have heard of John's preaching and his baptism
- And now Jesus comes himself to be baptised.
- Two things I want to draw attention to today: Firstly:
- Jesus, in receiving a baptism, a washing of repentance
- Of turning back to God, is showing his oneness with us.
- This is important because often we need help

- But are afraid to ask for it because the people who are able to help
- Seem so far removed from us: better educated, or wealthier,
- Or better connected: people who have better things to do
- Than to spend time and attention on us.
- But Jesus comes down to where we are in our need
- Including our need for repentance
- Our need to admit that we have done wrong things
- That we feel helpless in the face of temptation
- That we need strength to live a different way:
- Strength that we don't naturally have.

Secondly: Jesus showed that in being with us in our need

- He had the power of the Spirit
- And the approval of the Father: **'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'**
- The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are a community of love:
- They are not at war with each other, willing different things
- So, we can be sure that the one God wills to help us in our need
- And that in Jesus we see who God truly is
- This means that since you are in Christ,
- You need not doubt that you have the approval of the Father:
- That Jesus' right standing with the Father,
- That Jesus life and strength, are yours, too.

What happens next is perhaps unexpected: **And the Spirit immediately drove [Jesus] out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.**

- Directly after hearing the word of approval from the Father
- Jesus is driven by the Spirit into the wilderness,
- Far away from human community
- Where he is tempted, or tested by Satan, the Accuser
- This is comforting for us to hear:

- Having the approval of God, and experiencing the reality
- Of having the supports in life removed, and facing testing
- Are not two different realities, but part of life with God:
- *God wills to grow us, to make us mature in the life of love.*
- So, we do not need to fear if we have difficulties
- With money or relationships or health,
- We do not need to fear that God does not love us;
- And we do not need to fear when we face temptation
- That God has abandoned us:
- Jesus himself faced temptation in the desert
- As a real human being: not an animal or an angel
- And he stood firm in the life of faith
- So we have someone who understands what it's like
- To be a human being, to be in need:
- We have someone who can help us
- In the griefs and the temptations of life.

After Jesus is in the wilderness something dramatic happens:

- John the Baptist is arrested:
- John goes on his own path to suffering and death.
- And with John's arrest Jesus begins his ministry of preaching
- This is what we read: **Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'**
- The word of God cannot be suppressed by human power:
- Jesus proclaims the message of repentance
- And the breaking in of the reign of God:
- That right here and now there is a true and lasting kingdom
- Breaking in, a kingdom that is established by God
- Not by human beings: a kingdom that,
- Because it is a kingdom of love,
- Has true authority, and glory, and majesty.

- But it is a kingdom that is entered into not by birth
- Or by money, or status, or intelligence, or strength
- *But by repentance*: by admitting our need
- By naming our sin; by trusting in the mercy of God.

And repentance is not theoretical, but practical

- We can repent in our private prayers:
- As we shut the door and pray to our Father in secret
- We can repent as we come to the Lord's table
- And eat and drink the body and blood of Christ
- For the forgiveness of our sins
- We can also repent as we use private confession and absolution
- As we meet with a pastor, name our sins,
- And hear a Spirit-filled word of forgiveness in Jesus' name
- Luther gives this practical advice in the Small Catechism: ***We can examine our everyday life according to the Ten Commandments - - for example, how we act toward father or mother, son or daughter, husband or wife, or toward the people with whom we work, and so on. We may ask ourselves whether we have been disobedient or unfaithful, bad-tempered or dishonest, or whether we have hurt anyone by word or deed.***
- If we are feeling unwell it would be foolish not to tell the doctor
- Exactly what's wrong: it might be embarrassing
- But it is the path of healing
- It can be embarrassing to admit to God, or to a fellow Christian,
- That we have sinned, that we need help,
- But it's practical, and, as Jesus says, God lifts up the humble
- And he covers our shame with his righteousness

It is Jesus who covers our shame,

- And who shares his right standing with God
- He is establishing his kingdom here and now by his word
- And giving us the gift of repentance.