

## **Eternal Peace**

12/6/2020

Mark 1:1-8

The day was July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1990. That is the day I was baptized. I don't remember that day personally, because at that point, I was just shy of four months old, but I remember the pictures of my baptism and of the party afterwards. I know in the past I was told that I was a very peaceable baby during my baptism. I didn't cry at all when I was sprinkled with the water, and I imagine this was a joyous moment for my parents. So, in thinking about it, I called my mother to ask how she felt when I was baptized and when she and my father were taking those vows for me, the same vows I would take for myself almost fourteen years later when I went through confirmation. The answer she gave me about how she felt when I was being baptized, I feel, made a lot of sense and maybe because of how deep of an answer it was. She described the experience as being very emotional, but at the same time feeling at peace. She said that, in having me baptized, she felt that much more connected to the congregation she herself was baptized in, raised in, and had me and my brothers baptized in. She felt connected to the saints that came before us and helped to bring us into the world. As a result of feeling that connection, while taking on these huge vows along with my father on my behalf, she felt totally at peace, knowing that she was supported by the pastor and the congregation as they made their vows in my baptism. She knew what she and my father were doing was the right thing, and she found peace in that fact. For her, my being baptized was a very peaceful occasion, much as I remember my confirmation being peaceful to me.

So too is this the message we receive from the gospel reading for today. In the reading, we have no miracles or teachings from Jesus. In fact, Jesus himself doesn't even make an appearance in today's story. At this point, he is yet to be baptized, have the Spirit descend upon him, and have God the Father say, "This is my Son with whom I'm well-pleased." He's yet to be tested in the wilderness, walk on water, or do any of the amazing things we are told Jesus does during his ministry. What we have in the story today, rather, is a foreshadowing of what Jesus will bring. People from all of Judea and Jerusalem, the epicenter of the Abrahamic faiths, are flooding to the River Jordan to hear John the Baptist speak and to be baptized, to be washed clean of their sins and absolved. Those who come to him find peace in their being absolved and made clean. They have been purified for the time being, and they find peace in that fact. John the Baptist brings greater peace than this to them, though.

As people are gathering to be baptized and to hear him speak, he speaks of a second baptism performed by one greater than him, by one who will baptize not with water, but with the Spirit itself. Here we have a redefining of "baptism," of this purification ritual. Up to this point, baptism is something that can be done more than once and that people are encouraged to do more than once. However, rather than using water, something that dries up and runs off the body, something that doesn't last, just as the absolution doesn't last, this one who is yet to come will use the Spirit, something that is permanent and know no end. With that baptism by the Spirit, there is a promise of not just momentary peace, but of eternal peace. The purification, the absolution, the forgiveness received as a result of this baptism with the Spirit is as endless and unconditional as the love of the one who sends this foreshadowed Jesus. Up to this point, the people of Judea and Israel have heard of the coming Messiah and have been anxiously awaiting

the triumphal arrival of the one who will save them from their greatest enemy. The people hear John the Baptist delivering this message, and they understand he is talking about the forthcoming Messiah. He is saying that the Messiah is close at hand, both in regards to space and time, and this message alone brings them peace. Mind you, though, this is not all that there is to this second, more permanent baptism.

Along with that “permanent absolution” though comes another benefit: power. The Spirit descends on Jesus and he performs miracles. The Spirit descends upon the disciples and they speak in tongues so that all may hear the Word of God and understand it. The Spirit is present in Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and others as they split seas and perform these great miracles. The Spirit is present with all of those called upon to carry out God’s work. Through this baptism of the Spirit, all recipients are given the power to do God’s work in the world.

All of this holds true for us as well, not just for John’s original audience. We ourselves are empowered by God to do God’s work, the work of making and sustaining peace in the world, through our baptisms. We are forgiven not just of our sins thus far but of those sins yet to come. Just as the Spirit descends upon Jesus and the Father says, “This is my Son with whom I’m well-pleased,” so too does God say this when we ourselves are baptized. God claims us as His own, eternally marked as Children of God and heirs to God’s Kingdom. I invite you all, therefore, this day and every day, to remember your baptism and therein to be at peace. As those who have been baptized not just with water but with the Spirit, you are eternally forgiven, eternally called, and eternally God’s. God has claimed you as His, and what greater peace have we than that?