

**Come to the waters of God's Grace**  
**February 18, 2024 Lent 1**  
**Mark 1:9-15**  
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**Grand Rapids, MI**

Are you familiar with the term watershed? We know we are in the Plaster Creek Watershed. It's a geographic term that determines the direction that water will flow to find a tributary or body of water. For instance, we know that when it rains here will end up in Plaster Creek and the Grand Watershed but water falling further east may be flowing into the Saginaw watershed. So, when we say we are facing or experiencing a watershed moment it is an event that, looking back, we know changed the course of our lives.

Watershed moments can be subtle or clearly impactful and dramatic. A subtle example for me was what brought me to United Seminary and the UCC. I had a two-minute conversation with a man named Paul who told me about United Seminary and encouraged me to come to their campus day that was happening. I could have blown it off but something said this is a sign from God. I went and a few months later I was sitting down at my first seminary class. It changed my life course. Dramatic watershed moments could be something like a disaster or dramatic event like the flood we see in Genesis.

But I wonder what watershed moment Jesu experienced. We believe that Jesus was about 30 years old when he decided to go from Galilee down to the Jordan river. What was it about that moment that changed the course of his life? We mark Jesus' baptism as the beginning of his ministry, but what did he hear and see and experience that shifted in him?

Today's reading says Jesus came from Galilee to see or hear John preach. He decides to be baptized and as he comes out of the water and hears a voice. That is how Mark's version records it. we have some variation in the other gospels but in this version only Jesus hears the words of God. "You are my beloved and in you I am well pleased." What a life changing sound to have in our ears, to hear beyond measure that

affirmation that you are sufficient, you are perfect, you are loved, you are cherished and someone is proud of you.

I hope that every one of us is able to think back to a time in our lives where that was the message we heard from someone significant and it altered the course of our lives. I hope we take time to also be that voice for others, encouraging them with our love. Those words of love and affirmation can shift one's life. To know someone believes in you or to hear "you've got this" or "I am proud of you" can be a watershed moment they need.

Jesus hears those words and for whatever reason those words compelled Jesus to go to the wilderness instead of returning to Galilee. I love Mark's vibrant and energetic words used here to describe it. He says the Spirit DROVE Jesus out to the wilderness. Matthew and Luke say Jesus was led by the spirit. Do you get the feeling Jesus had little choice in the matter? When have you felt compelled by the Spirit to do something? Is that part of what it means to be in the wilderness?

As a watershed moment I think a wilderness is an important step toward a new way of being. Jesus first needed to wrestle with his own demons, of fear, self-doubt and denial, before he faced the crowds of critics he in Nazareth and Jerusalem. We often are our worst critic. If we don't conquer those inner voices that tell us we don't have what it takes, or we are too young, or too old or whatever the inner voice may be saying, we need to learn to deal with them before we hear it out in the world. I have heard some people call it imposter syndrome where you feel like an imposter, and you can't believe you belong there. But look in the bible there are plenty of examples where God called someone that others felt were the wrong person. But as the saying goes "God does not call the qualified, God qualifies the called."

All these temptations, lies, doubts and fears are there to test our inner strength to have faith in God, not in ourselves. Those were the temptations that Jesus faced temptations to make him step away from his calling. Mark doesn't detail the temptations but we have all been there. Jesus was out there for forty days wrestling

with himself first. It reminds me of a Michael Jackson song called Man in the Mirror. The lyrics say, "I've got to make a change and I got to start with the man in the mirror." We need to first face ourselves in our wilderness for this watershed moment to change the course of our lives and the lives of others.

After facing his temptations and inner voices of critique, Jesus came down and heard the news that John was arrested. There is a gap in the ministry and Jesus faces his first test. Does he stay on the sidelines or step into the gap to complete the work John started. Jesus sees the need, but can he say, "yes Lord I'm stepping into where John was and I'm going to carry on proclaiming the Good News." Where do we see a gap and step in? Where do we feel called to carry on the work of others who have gone before us?

Jesus takes John's work and begins to preach the good news. "The Kingdom of God is here. Repent." This was a bold message, a challenging message, a dangerous message. Jesus knew this action could also get him arrested and even killed. Still, he pushes forward with bold words. We don't know for sure if Jesus knew that his ministry would end at the cross. But he surely knew his work to challenge to sin and corruption in the world around him was dangerous work. He knew the cost and said yes and he calls each of us to do the same. We hear his words from Mark chapter 8, "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."

We, like Jesus, start our Lenten journey at the baptismal font remembering God's promises at the waters of Grace. It is our first watershed where we turn away from the ways of the world to walk as disciples of the Christ pursuing God's kingdom and righteousness. We come to the waters empty handed, confessing our sins. We rise from these waters a new person hearing those words of God's amazing love and grace, "You are my beloved in whom I am well pleased" That is not enough though. We need to conquer our own inner demons and be filled with the holy spirit. This time

in the wilderness is a deep wrestling and confidence building for the real work ahead. What are the inner voices that hold you back? That cause you to doubt God's call on your life? What false promises have you bought into that divert you away from God's call on your life? This is your wilderness time to wrestle with those demons and put your foot firmly on the path of transformation.

Another watershed moment comes when we decide will we get involved or stay on the sidelines. What event was your watershed and you stood up and took action? Maybe volunteer for an organization, participate in a march, attend a presentation, or speak up in defense of that issue? When have you seen the need for leaders and decided to step up and do your part to make sure it continues?

Every movement needs those people who stand up and say, "I will stand up for what is right." John Lewis did it. He almost lost his life on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Alabama on what is now known as Bloody Sunday in 1965. He was beaten, bloodied, and had a concussion, on that bridge. But instead of giving up, he picked up his cross again and he kept going until his final days as a U.S. Representative at the age of eighty. He called it getting into Good Trouble.

At his funeral these words were read from a speech he wrote to those who were carrying on the fight for him.

"Though I may not be here with you, I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe. In my life, I have done all I can to demonstrate that the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence is the more excellent way. Now it is your turn to let freedom ring."

You see our baptism is not just a baptism, it is a watershed moment in our lives. We hear the call of God's grace-filled words, "You are my beloved in whom I am well pleased." We feel the push of the Spirit to prepare and face our inner critic and inner critics to silence and then we hear Jesus say, "The Kingdom of God is at hand." And we step up to be engaged citizens and get into Good Trouble.