

Joke: Some older nuns were staying in high rise on their visit to New York. After a long day of exploring they were beat. So they go back ready to call it a day but before they could get ready for the night a fire broke out. It engulfed the place they were staying relatively quickly.

The fire department got there within minutes but since the fire flared up so fast they were struggling to get everyone out.

One of the nuns spoke up and told the others to quickly take off their habits.

She then tied them together attached one end to something secure in the room, threw the other end out the window and they all climbed down to safety.

As they arrived on the ground the fire chief runs over and asks them were they scared, how could they be so sure that everything would hold up on their descent.

The oldest and maybe even most wise nun replied, "wasn't scared a bit, after all everybody knows that it's hard to break an old habit."

John the Baptist - It feels like God is on the move

Show video.

Baptism is one of those tricky things for churches? There are those that sprinkle and others that immerse in water. But let me just say this about baptism. I think everyone should be. I don't believe it is necessary for your salvation but it needs to be respected and

appreciated for what it is. Jesus was baptized we should be as well. Baptism is a public celebration of us being spiritually crucified, buried, and raised to newness of life in Christ. And so, we celebrate in baptism what has already taken place as in us and for us as we became followers of Jesus.

And in case your wondering I do baptism by immersing.

And, as we talk about Jesus and His baptism. . .we're talking about submersion. Fully dipping someone under the water and bringing them back up. . .and I want to encourage you to give it prayerful thought because it's all about being NEW. And John who we will be looking at today fully dipped Jesus and it was one of those moments when everything changed.

Sometimes we forget that John and Jesus were cousins. We forget the crazy preacher in the wilderness eating locusts and honey has a deep connection to the Christmas story. And I know this is only getting close to Easter but bear with me. . .

The angel comes and tells Elizabeth she's going to have a son who will point the way to the Son of God. Then Mary shows up and the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaps at the sound of Mary's voice. That baby was John the Baptist.

Strange how much "the voice" plays a role in John's life. He hears Mary's voice and leaps inside his mother's womb. His father loses his voice and can't speak for the whole of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

Ok ladies, enough with the smiling, I get it, a husband without a voice for nine months.

John becomes “the voice in the wilderness.” People come from miles around to hear him preach.

John baptizes Jesus and he hears the voice of God. “This is my son with whom I am pleased.”

This would be the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. He hadn’t preached a single sermon. He hadn’t done any miracles that we are aware of. He’s basically been hanging around home for thirty years. . and yet his father is pleased.

Later, the goal of the Romans was to have John’s voice silenced. And hear this church our words have power. We all know that phrase sticks-and-stones right? Words aren’t supposed to hurt? It’s a lie. Words can cut. And cut deep. Words can break your heart.

I love how, in the video, John says the words came out of him like a swarm of bees. He didn’t say, “Like flowers and birdies” or “Sweet honey and cookies.” No, he said, like a swarm of bees.

Sometimes our mouths get us in trouble. Some of us need to slow down enough to think before we speak.

Could that be why we have Scripture's like. . .

James 1:19 (NIV): My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

Proverbs 17:28 (NIV): Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues.

And let me just pause here for a moment and say this. . .I am in no way saying let people walk all over you and never say a word. Be slow to speak Scripture says, learn to pick your battles. Not every situation requires a response. And also, as we will see from John stand up for the truth of God's word at all times.

John is the voice in the wilderness. He was called to it. When you speak what you think are God's words you can't edit them you just need to speak what you heard. And when you do that they become your words.

John spoke and let the words do what they were supposed to do. Consequences, forget the consequences!

A pastor named Mike Yaconelli once said, "Give them the truth and let the truth do it's own work."

It's a message for us pastors and really for all of us. Sometimes we have to get out of our own way. Speak.

It's not the pen that is mightier than the sword. . .it's the words they write.

We can't wrestle someone into the Kingdom. We use word. We invite them. We say what Jesus said. We plant the seeds. We give them the truth and let God do the rest.

Simply put we love God and love others.

And let me say this as well church, you are loved. . .unconditionally. Its not just what God does it's who He is. God is love.

Love is patient and kind and looks out for the other guy.

John the Baptist helps us to begin a walk toward Easter even though he finds himself stuck in a jail cell. Maybe that's how you feel today: stuck.

Maybe not stuck in a jail cell, but you may feel like your life is walled in and not really going anywhere. Perhaps you feel stuck in your job, stuck in your marriage, stuck in school, stuck in your financial situation or even stuck in your relationship with God.

But, no matter where you are or how you are feeling, God wants you to know that he is with you, for you, and wants you to experience his love and grace, fresh and new today.

Our God is on the move. He is anything but stuck. He invites us to know him and live our lives unstuck and in step with him through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the truth of his word.

One of the great opportunities that we have during this particular season of the year known as Lent is to move toward a fresh start in an intentional pursuit of Jesus.

Lent is the springtime of the soul that followers of Jesus have used throughout church history as a period to pursue a fresh and focused relationship with Jesus.

Lent consists of 40 days plus the seven Sundays, or 47 total days, to prepare our hearts and lives to celebrate the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus as we approach Easter. And it is the perfect time to get “un-stuck” in your life; especially in your life with God.

If your soul has felt the effects of a wintry season, God wants to begin to thaw your heart and life so that new life can begin to spring forth.

In the video, John the Baptist not only was stuck in jail, but also something else was happening. Even though his ministry had ended by being stuck in prison, Jesus' public ministry was just getting started. And John played a big part in this new beginning with Jesus.

The Gospel of Mark activates our walk toward Easter today as John the Baptist helps Jesus to prepare for his public ministry that ultimately would lead to Calvary's cross. Let's explore the passage as we walk through it together. Mark chapter 1 beginning with verse 9. . .

Mark 1:9–15 (NIV): 9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." 12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, 13 and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. 14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

It is interesting that our text begins with Jesus being baptized by John in the Jordan River. Matthew's gospel account also conveys Jesus' baptism with a bit more detail. In fact, verses 14-15 of chapter 3 show that John was not feeling too confident about

baptizing the one whom he had been preparing the way to take away the sins of the world.

Matthew 3:14–15 (NIV): But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” 15 Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

Many questions have been asked and much has been written about why Jesus would desire to be baptized in the first place. Why would Jesus seek baptism if he had never sinned and had nothing to confess and repent of in his life? This is a fair question.

Many biblical scholars suggest when Jesus was baptized he was identifying himself with the people he came to save. Although Jesus had no sin that needed to be confessed and repented of, as those who are baptized do, Jesus was declaring his identity with human nature that is prone to weakness and sin.

His walk to the cross first passed through the waters of baptism not only as an example to those he came to save from their sins, but also because of a foreshadowing of what Jesus would become on the cross. The Apostle Paul writes of this in 2 Corinthians 5 when he reminds us:

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV): 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In a sense, Jesus became stuck in our sin so that we might become unstuck through his amazing grace by his broken body and blood that was shed as a sacrifice in our place on the cross.

God's perfect plan for Jesus was to be baptized and thus "fulfill all righteousness" as Jesus said in Matthew 3:15.

Biblical scholar Walter Wessel notes, "All righteousness' is a reference to God's plan and purpose for Jesus. Part of the plan was the complete identification of Jesus at the very outset of his ministry with man and his sin. This he did by submitting to baptism."

When Jesus waded into the water to be baptized he did it as a way to demonstrate that he was willing to do whatever it took not only to meet us where we are, but also to help us get un-stuck from our sin that we might move forward in the life God desires for us to experience.

Those who were present by the waters of the Jordan on that day experienced something unique and magnificent as well: a blessing from the Father to the Son coupled with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Mark 1:10–11 (NIV): Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Those words "with you I am well pleased" echo from Isaiah as he foreshadows the Lord's Chosen Servant and imparts the Spirit upon him.

Isaiah 42:1 (NLT): 1 "Look at my servant, whom I strengthen. He is my chosen one, who pleases me. I have put my Spirit upon him. He will bring justice to the nations.

This passage from Isaiah denotes the servant of the Lord who not only is being addressed, but also the divine promise of a better and new day of justice with peace is on the way.

All this will come through suffering that will take place in the life of Jesus who would be that chosen one who would be identified as the suffering servant that would give his life for all nations and people on the cross.

Mark's gospel allows his readers to see that it was a gradual and slow process before Jesus' disciples became aware of the true identity of Jesus as the suffering servant who was the chosen one that would rescue them from their lives stuck in sin.

This gradual understanding of the disciples that is depicted in the gospel of Mark gives hope to modern day disciples who feel stuck in their life and sin.

Hear this church, Jesus is patient and ultimately desires for all people to have a fresh start in him because of what he did at the cross to get us unstuck.

Jesus went to great lengths immediately after his baptism to prepare for the walk to the cross that he would make over the next three years.

Mark 1:12–13 (NLT): 12 The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, 13 where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him.

Numbers are significant and symbolic when mentioned in the Bible.

Jesus was out in the wilderness preparing for his public ministry as he fasted and was tempted. The time he was out there was 40 days. Lent is 40 days plus 7 Sundays. 7 by the way means completion.

The Israelites wandered 40 years in the wilderness and God flooded the earth with rain for 40 days and 40 nights.

Jim Denison has said, "Each of these historical biblical periods with 40 in it was a preparation for what was to follow."

Because Jesus prepared himself in the wilderness after his baptism and before his public ministry, we as followers of Jesus are invited and encouraged to prepare ourselves to celebrate the resurrection during this season as well.

No matter if we feel like we have been stuck 40 days, 40 weeks, 40 months or 40 years in our proverbial wilderness, God desires for us to know he is with us and is willing to lead us out of our wilderness and into a place of new beginnings.

His mercy and grace is new every morning and in abundance for all who will call upon his name. And this season is the perfect time to get unstuck by the power of Jesus and the truth of his word. And church the truth does set us free.

In these 40 days out in the wilderness

Verse 13 notes that Jesus was "with the wild animals" during his period of 40 days out in the wilderness. This part of the world at that time in history was known for being populated in the wilderness areas with hyenas, jackals, panthers and lions.

For Jesus, this was a time of focused preparation.

Perhaps we can relate in our own wilderness forms. For us, we may not face wild animals of the same sort as we prepare our hearts and lives for celebrating Jesus' resurrection. Nonetheless, we may have other temptations surrounding us in our wilderness that are inhabited not by hyenas, jackals, panthers or lions.

But instead, we may be feeling the presence of abusers, regrets, painful words spoken, reminders of our past, wild addictions, or simple scars that remind us of complicated history we have been a part of in days gone by.

Regardless of what surrounds us in the wilderness, Jesus empowers us by his Holy Spirit and gives us direction by his Holy Word found in the pages of Scripture if we will just choose to heed to it He will give us the strength to endure.

The final verses from our text remind us where we started and where John the Baptist was located. It also reminds us how Jesus started his public ministry.

Mark 1:14–15 (NLT): 14 Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News. 15 "The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!"

John had completed his assignment. He indeed had prepared the way of the Lord. His ministry was complete and would never be released from prison until his impending death occurred.

Jesus had survived his time in the wilderness and had conquered all temptations thrown his way by his enemy, and ours, the devil. He now was ready to embark on his public ministry and taking his first steps toward the cross.

The gospel accounts certainly will show many miraculous and demonstrative deeds done on behalf of those he came into contact with along the way.

However, his first order of business that is recorded in Mark's gospel is a proclamation that he makes. "Repent and believe."

The word for "repent" in the original language is metanoia. It means to rethink the way you think about things. It means to move forward in a new direction while leaving behind an old course.

The reason Jesus calls all who would hear his voice to a new way to think and a different direction to walk is because according to him, "the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand."

And I might add as well, His ways are so much better than ours. His plans for us are also good. And we might think we know what's good God knows what's best.

And now the timing is right and the decisive hour of God's saving action in history has now come. It is the point where leadership from the Messiah and action from all who would call him "Lord" must be taken. The "time is at hand" means the triumph of God is now so close that the powers of evil are being opposed and that means that evil no longer has the power to keep people stuck in their ways and trapped in their lives.

Jesus has come to set people free and invite a new direction and a new season of hope and life to be experienced. An abundant life at that.

And church, that is a message worth telling. That is a message worth sharing. That is a weight lifting word that must be experienced and enjoyed.

The beginning of Lent is an opportunity that feels like starting over. This is a hope that needs to swarm every person who needs to move from being stuck to being free. This is the beginning of the season that leads to the cross and ultimately ends in victory.