

Leavening Church

Thought for Sunday 21st February (Rev Dr Penny Worth)

I wonder if, like me, you've been watching more TV than usual during lockdown? We've been asking friends for recommendations, but I don't think we've watched any with such fast plot development as we see in today's reading ([Mark 1: 9-15](#)) of the Jesus story!

Mark certainly doesn't want us to get bored, does he? We've got Jesus baptism, temptation and the beginning of his ministry all in seven verses. At the beginning of his story, Mark is trying to engage us by setting out very quickly who Jesus is. In these first 15 verses he makes it clear that this story is about someone unique – we've never come across anyone like this before.

John the Baptist introduces Jesus to Mark's readers telling us that this is about someone who is so far above him that he's not worthy to untie his sandals, then in the account of Jesus baptism we hear about his divine connections. When Jesus is baptised, the heavens are torn apart, the spirit descends upon him and God speaks. Mark is telling us that this man is from God and of God; this man is connected to God like no other, we can think of him as God's son.

Then Mark moves on to the human nature of Jesus with the account of the temptation. As we say, 'to be human is to be tempted', and Jesus is no exception. There is no detail here, but we know from the other gospels that Jesus is tempted to misuse his power, to take an easier path, to turn from God's way to something that looks more attractive. But he recognises these tempting thoughts of power and influence for what they are – the opposite of God's way of self-giving and he turns his face resolutely to costly service.

With only half a breath to tell us John has been arrested, Mark rushes on to the start of Jesus ministry and we see Jesus in Galilee proclaiming his message of good news: this is the moment, God has come near. And he invites people to turn back to God, to turn their lives round and believe the good news; the good news being that God is here, God is bothered about them and God is offering them a different sort of life.

So we've got 3 bits here: Jesus is uniquely connected to God, Jesus is human like us, and Jesus brings good news. It's only when we hold these first two bits together that the good news appears: only someone who is connected to God **and** is one of us can connect us to God.

The image of the heavens torn apart at Jesus baptism is a symbol of the shattering of the barrier between God and humanity that happens when God comes to us in a human life. It's a symbol of how close God comes to us in Jesus.

And don't we need that at the moment! In all we've been through this last year, we need to see, to know, to feel God beside us, behind us, before us, within us. We might have felt a bit short of good news – well this is good news!

However locked in, locked down, isolated, separated we are, the offer is there of new life, life in all its fullness, life lived in companionship with God himself. As we look forward through lent toward easter, we can glimpse that fulfilled life and find the courage to grasp it and live it. Life in all its fullness is not about escaping from lockdown, it's about who we are walking alongside.