

## *Genuine Acceptance*

Mark 1: 4-11 (January 10, 2021)

### ***Mark 1: 4-11***

4John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

9In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10And 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. 11And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

### ***Historical Context***

There is no word in Mark about the birth or youth of Jesus. He starts right in with Jesus' baptism as the beginning of his ministry.

### ***Theme: Genuine Acceptance***

One feature of today's culture is the omnipresence of *affirmation*. One of the reasons social media is so powerful is precisely because it creatively offers *affirmation* in plentiful doses. Deep down, of course, we know that this kind of affirmation doesn't mean all that much. Or at least shouldn't. Sherry Turkle - MIT professor, internet scholar, and author of *Alone Together* - has discovered that people today report feeling BOTH *more connected* AND *lonelier* than ever before. Why? Because while we may crave *affirmation*, what we need is *acceptance*.

Acceptance is the exact opposite of "fitting in." Fitting in is all about changing yourself so as to be found acceptable to your peers. Acceptance is simply and crucially being valued just as you are. There is nothing more necessary in leading a healthy, productive life than feeling accepted.

Which is where baptism comes in. Notice two things in Mark's story. First, notice God's words to Jesus are personal, poignant, and powerful. "*You* are my beloved son. With *you* I am well pleased." Wrapped in these words are the blessings of identity, worth, and unwavering regard. Second, notice that Jesus' baptism isn't preamble to all that comes later in his life. It's the highpoint. As Jesus casts out unclean spirits, heals the sick, feeds the hungry, and welcomes the marginalized, he will do to others what has already been done to him, telling them via word and deed that they, too, are beloved children of God with whom God is well pleased.

And when Jesus feels absolutely abandoned on the cross, this is followed immediately by the story of resurrection, where the messenger testifies that God has kept God's baptismal promise and continues to accept and honor Jesus as God's own beloved Son. So also, at our low moments, we might remember that God promised in baptism to never abandon us and to love and accept us always, even and especially when we have a hard time loving and accepting ourselves. Baptism is so incredibly important because it offers us the acceptance, not merely affirmation, of the Creator and thereby empowers us to accept others in turn.