

God's Beloved

BP-11, Jan. 8, 2012
Mk. 1:4-11

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Memorial, Afton

The Iowa caucuses are over and thus begins this election season in earnest.
I *love* election years.

I don't watch TV

and so am not exposed to negative ads hammering away,
and that helps in appreciating our electoral process.

I love election years for the testing of ideas and jockeying for position.

Candidates are proven in relentless contest for public approval.
It's better than football!

Everyone is part of the drama,

and *everyone* is affected by the outcome.

By political campaigns our nation decides direction for coming years

and through campaigns our collective will is known.

In the end, one is chosen.

Arising from the marathon of months is *the chosen one*.

For what it's worth, the people have spoken.

We the people decide who shall be our leader.

Political campaigns are about *the people* deciding.

In most cases, democracy works.

There are many who call themselves Christian

who prefer to keep religious things in the church,
that church is for spiritual matters,
home is for family matters,
government is the place for politics,
and business ethics is purely a business matter.

All is neat and tidy and simple.

Political views are unencumbered by morality.

Work and business need not be accountable to society's good.

Religion is a matter of personal choice,
at the comfort and preference of each individual.

There are many Christians who insist on picking and choosing for themselves
what and who to believe.

There are many who would make their own god according to what they think is best,

and the Bible is a catalog of values from which to shop,

and church is a vender of religious services from which to choose.

It's democratic religion where people choose for themselves their gods.

Jesus fouls up the system.

Jesus transgresses the neat compartments of life.

Jesus brings religion to bear upon family and politics and business,

and will not abide us telling God who God should be.

Jesus will not keep God in heaven and will not let us off so easy.

What God *have* we?

John the baptizer left the comforts of home and family

for a difficult and dangerous life in the wilderness.

He renounced worldly comforts as sign of impending importance.

He called for repentance.

He called for something better.

He called for a baptism that symbolized change.

People from the whole countryside and all the city went out to hear him.

They came confessing sin.

They confessed their own sin.
 They *also* confessed the sin of the way the world was going.
 People were sick and tired of pettiness and meanness and selfishness.
 People were sick and tired of being manipulated,
 of being used for other people's enrichment,
 of being duped and lied to and pushed around.
 They came *to repent* of the world's ways.
 Baptism was a personal act of renouncing all that is wrong with the world.
 It was a commitment to live differently.
 Baptism was also an act of defiance,
 a demonstration that from now on *no more* shall the powers of this world prevail.
 From now on, *God, the Lord Almighty*,
 will call the shots and determine their actions.

Jesus came and joined the shoreline queue awaiting baptism.
 His turn came and he waded into the muddy river.
 Now, John knew Jesus.
 John heard all the stories of Jesus' birth, of all that was said about him.
 John has, after all, been telling everyone about the savior to come.
 Jesus came and John baptized him too.
 Jesus joined the repentance,
 not because *he* needed repenting,
 but because *the world* needed it.
 Jesus repented of *the world's sin*,
 on behalf of all that has gone wrong,
 repented for the sake of those who would not, could not repent themselves.¹
 Things have gotten so bad that only God can restore, and so Jesus comes.

Our standing with God, our righteousness and goodness,
 has nothing to do with the sincerity or success of our moral effort,
 it has nothing to do with worth or character or achievement.
 God is *not* impressed.
 Our standing with God, our salvation,
 has nothing to do with some *self-declaration* of "Christian,"
 nothing to do with our self-identification—or delusion.
 Our saying so *does not* join God to our cause.
 Our standing with God
 has nothing to do with whose side we are one,
 what winners we and our country decide.
 And God is not beholden to any one nation.
 Our standing with God,
 our salvation and safety,
 our right to boldly come into this sacred place,
 is given to us as a *gift of grace*
 through God *entering* our humanity as Jesus
 and from *within humanity*, making us perfect in the eyes of God.
 We humans cannot make ourselves good enough to stand before God,
 and so God comes to stand *with us*,
 coming into *our* weakness and selfishness and cowardice
 so as to bring holiness *to us*.

Jesus was baptized by John.
 Rising from the waters, the heavens were torn apart
 and the Spirit of God descended like a dove upon him.

¹ 2 Cor. 5:21.

Not a soaring eagle of glory,
 not a powerful angel of vengeance,
 not a roaring lion or charging elephant of strength,
 but like a dove of peace and purity.
 The greatest power is not violence or force.
The greatest power is resolute, confident trust in God's mercy and love.
 The Spirit of God landed upon *Jesus*.
 God's Spirit came *to Jesus*.
 We *shall not* pick our gods,
 and we *shall not* pick our saviors.
 It is the Almighty God of Heaven who decides,
 who chose *Jesus*,
 who set *Jesus* as our Lord and leader.
 And lest we try to weasel out or reason away this fact,
 a voice booms from heaven,
 "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Deep down it is what *we all* wish to hear from our own fathers.
 Many of us have never heard those words.
 Many of us have not said them to our children.
 It is a precious gift we can give to our sons and our daughters,
 a gift no money can buy and no one else can give.
 It is a precious gift to say to our children,
 "I am proud of you."
 It is something most of us seldom hear.
 It is something most of us think we don't deserve.
*"You know, God, there are things I have done,
 things not good, things no one knows about."*
*"I have said things about others.
 I have shameful thoughts."*
*"God, I am less than what I should be.
 I am less than I can be.
 I am not as good as the face I show."*
"God, I cannot live up to the standards you have set."

God answers.
 God has some words about this.
 God says to us,
 "Yes, I *know* all that.
 And I say to you, still, I am well pleased with you."

We don't get to choose our god;
God chooses us.
 We don't get to decide what we want to believe;
God shows us God's love.
 God *insists* on being our loving Father.
 God *insists* on loving us and guiding us.
 God *insists* on overlooking our sin
 and seeing us delightful, precious, wonderful sons and daughters.
 By *Jesus*, God is proud of you!

And so,
The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine upon you...
 shine with the swelling pride of a Father,
 shine with the love of one who holds you precious,
 shine with pleasure in a job well-done. Amen.