

Acts 19: 1-7

Mark 1:4-11

The humble superstar

Do you remember this introduction to a TV program from long ago, "It's bird, it's a plane, it's Superman. Superman who was faster than a speeding bullet, more power full than a locomotive and able to leap tall buildings with a single bound, can bend steel in his bare hands. Disguised as Clark Kent the mild-mannered reporter for a large metropolitan newspaper, fights a never-ending battle for truth, justice and the American way."

I remember watching it when I was growing up and it was one of my favourite programs. Superman has had a long life. He was born in the comic books, grew in television and matured in film.

Superman always defended those who were powerless to defend themselves; he was responsible to bring justice to the land.

Using his great power and strength and his x-ray vision he was able to subdue the guilty parties and bring them to justice.

One quality of the superman of TV, was his gentle manner. There was some violence in the episodes, but not like the kind we have today. He never killed and usually he tried to be very gentle. Superman was moved by emotions; but he always had a gentle touch, he was sensitive to human feelings. Superman showed us that the mighty, the powerful can also be tender, loving and caring. We don't see that sort of gentle goodness in the world today. Instead we seem to see people in films and on TV, shoot, kill, blow-up, people, places and things. Perhaps we miss the calm, gentle, touch of Superman as he stood for justice in a way that brought justice and integrity along with goodness, kindness and compassion.

Isaiah speaks of another superman, one who would bring justice to the land. In Isaiah 42: 2-4 it says " he will not cry or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break and a dimly burning wick he will not quench."

In our gospel lesson, John the Baptist says; "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." This "superman" will be powerful, but in a gentle, loving, compassionate way. We are of course speaking of Jesus as he came to represent the Messiah, God's chosen and powerful leader.

Chosen to bring justice and peace into this world, chosen to bring freedom to the oppressed, but in a gentle and meek way.

The baptism of Jesus was his signal or sign to begin his public ministry. In this baptism performed by John, Jesus understood that his ministry of justice was to begin. And in this baptism, Jesus learned of this relationship with the Father.

He saw his ministry was a new beginning in his life and for the world, and he understood he was called to serve, called to serve with a gentle touch and a compassionate smile.

We are going to look at the relationship Jesus learned about himself and His Father in heaven this morning.

In this baptism experience, Jesus received a sign from his Father, assuring him of his new role, a sign assuring him he was about the plan of his Father, assuring him that the Father through the spirit would be with him as he began his public ministry.

The text says, "10 And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; 11 and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased."RSV

A relationship was established between Jesus and the Father, a relationship which would give Jesus the strength, the confidence, the courage, the faith to endure the hardships of his public ministry.

This relationship would help Jesus endure the fate of the cross, to endure the testing and criticism of the religious leaders and to endure His battle with Satan before the glorious resurrection on that first morning of the week. This baptism renewed , strengthened, and cemented together the relationship Jesus had with his Father. It was a sign from the Father in heaven that Jesus was beginning his chosen appointed task.

Jesus was to begin his public ministry, begin his public life serving the Father in the same way all of us begin our life of faith through baptism.

Obedience is certainly a characteristic of humility, but in Mark's gospel there is a special significance. In verse 10 it says that as Jesus came up from the water of his baptism the heavens were "torn apart". The word means a violent "rip". The only other time Mark used the word was the crucifixion scene where the temple veil is "torn" from top to bottom at Christ's death.

It is entirely possible, that here Jesus sees the end of his mission, the cross; it's not a pretty sight for Jesus as we imagine this inspiring scene to be. - They say that Christmas is a wonderful meal, except for the one who provided the drumsticks!

Jesus knows what's ahead. The Father says words in heaven that have been spoken before in the Son's presence:

As this baptism of Jesus signalled a beginning, a starting point for Jesus in his life of public ministry, so too with us. Baptism begins a process; baptism is a starting point for us in our faith life. It is a step taken to begin our life with God, to begin our life in the grace and love of God, and to have his spirit with us, as we walk down the road of life.

One author says this about baptism, "Whether an infant or adult, the person baptized answers from that moment to the name Christian.

No other loyalty comes before this and being a Christian should be the baptized person's most distinctive characteristic."

Somehow the baptism event in your life and mine should make us different people.

Somehow because we are God's in our baptism, that should make us different, set apart people, because we have been given a new name, the name of Christ sealed by the sign of the cross.

Remember in the Old Testament, Abram was called by God to begin the process of establishing God's chosen people, and his aged wife Sarai was called to begin the process by having a son in her mature years, and then remember that God then changed their names to Abraham, and Sarah, changing their names meant for them a special relationship had been established with God.

Remember Paul, before God encountered him on the road, he was Saul, but after God had transformed him, after God had begun a new kind of relationship with him, Saul's name was changed to Paul.

Here is a story about the 41st President of the USA, George H. W. Bush snr. It seems the senior President Bush was touring a nursing home.

As he walked down the hall with his entourage of aides and reporters, he came upon one old man who was slowly making his way in the opposite direction.

The president reached out, took the patient's hand, and asked gently, "Sir, do you know who I am?"

The man stared back blankly for a moment; then his eyes focused. Slowly he shook his head from side to side. "No," he admitted, "I don't know who you are. But if you ask the nurses, they can tell you."

When the voice from heaven spoke, no one had to guess who Jesus might be. The Holy One of Heaven said, "You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Our names are changed in our baptism.

We are given the name that our parents have chosen for us, and at the same time we are given the name of Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, a person who has begun a relationship with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. We are God's people. We are in a relationship with God. God and I are one as He is with each of you here today.

Do you love the shepherd in such a way that it shows to those around you? Do love him in a humble, mild-mannered way which demonstrates his love in your life?

A superman appeared on the scene over 2000 years ago.

A superman who was to change our lives as they could have never been changed before. This superman had a gentle touch, a compassionate heart and a healing touch.

This superman, Jesus, knew his relationship with the Father in heaven, and through that relationship, He was able to know and do the Father's will on this earth.

Have you let that superman, that Jesus touch your life?

Amen.