



February 18, 2018 - Evil as Aberration of Reality

Given by Rev. Mattei

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."*
(Mark 1:14-15)

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus is baptized, claimed by God, driven out into the wilderness by the Spirit, tempted by Satan. Then he begins his ministry. That's a lot to have happen in a few short verses. Other Gospels go into more detail about Jesus' baptism and temptation, but the Gospel of Mark gets right to the point of Jesus' ministry. In Mark we are not told how his life as a young Jew has prepared him for the life turning experience of the Baptism. However, Baptism seems to be the pivotal experience when Jesus gets claimed as a Child of God. This profound experience cannot stay hidden. It marks someone's identity.

John's arrest is highlighted by Mark as the spark that propelled Jesus into the public arena. Jesus finds it compelling and imperative to get involved in the important work of letting people know that the kingdom of God is present and available: in Jesus God is here with and among us. God's kingdom is the only thing that is real. Everything else is a distortion of reality, a distortion of God's goal for humanity: to share in God's abundant and eternal life, one so fruitful that it constantly seeks expression. In a non-violent way Jesus demonstrates that vulnerability and love are a force more powerful than violence and hate. As spiritual master Fr. John Main explains:

"The fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ and Christ dwells in us. In his indwelling we find our own completion. To be complete as human beings we must live this mystery not just intellectually, not just emotionally but with our full being. What the New Testament cries out to us is that the fullness of being we are summoned to, dwells within our being as it is now and is realized when our being and the being of God come into full resonant harmony."

And then he simply clarifies how we are going to get there: “Meditation invites us to enter the resonant harmony of God.”¹

God creates from an overflowing abundance of love, joy, and creativity. God’s purpose for creating the universe is the sharing of God’s life, an invitation to be part of the goodness, beauty and fullness of God. What God does in the act of creation is to create in God’s image and likeness.² What of that which is created can then be bad or evil? Evil has entered the world out of greed, profiteering and corruption of the heart. The Roman Empire did not build roads and aqueducts for the benefit of the nations and the spreading of well-being. They did it for themselves for the purpose of conquering new lands, establishing an occupying army for the control of the population and the exploitation of the land’s resources. Any evil is lack of wholeness and righteousness and the aberration of the image of God.

The nation is once again in deep mourning and distress and the flag flies at half-staff. Evil has once again brought darkness over the children of the Light. Seventeen people have just been mowed down and like in way too many other times we need to decide if we will let greed, profiteering and corruption of the heart control us and the way we live.³

Before Jesus begins his public life, he is baptized and claimed by God. Our ministry in the world begins with our own baptism. Indeed, we are all called to be witnesses to God’s kingdom in the world, so we too have important work to do. In the Affirmation of Baptism in the Lutheran church, we renew our baptismal commitment to God. We acknowledge we are God’s and we enthusiastically renew the promise “to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.”

This is serious business and you might say that you were not aware that this is what you were signing up for. But we need to know two things about the promises we made.

First of all, they are not a contractual agreement with God and we will not be punished if we don’t do any of that. We simply remain incomplete, immature. What we do out of deep love for God is only but an attempt at saying “Thank You” for all God has done for us, for the grace received. It is an opportunity we are given to express with creativity the love God has put into our heart: it’s how we let the image of God shine a smile of appreciation and compassion, acceptance and inclusion, acknowledgment and collaboration for the building of a just society.

¹ Laurence Freeman, John Main: Essential Writings, Orbis Books (2002) p. 62

² Genesis 1:26

³ February 14, 2018, shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Secondly, it is a way to affirm and develop our very self, our talents and passions. It's an opportunity to grow and express ourselves, a privilege to be able to contribute to the beauty of the world and the progress of all people.

Baptized in Jesus, we are reconciled in the divine image imprinted in us and we live our life in him, rooted in the goodness of God and inspired and sustained for righteous living. The kingdom of God has come near, indeed. "Repent" might just simply mean to decide whom we live for. "Believe in the gospel" might just mean trust the Light of Christ in you, honor the presence of God in you: do not let darkness take over but let the Light of the Lord be a lamp to your steps and renew the image of God in you.