



## **“And So It Begins”**

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### **Scripture (NRSV):**

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

4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And 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. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He 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. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

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

### **Sermon:**

“You are mine. You are beloved.”

If you hear this spoken to you, as an infant, as a child, as a grown person...then this life really begins, for you.

- When babies hear this, they thrive.
- When teenagers hear this, they face the ups and downs of their age and know they have people to lean on that they trust to help them make it through.
- When an adult hears this, then, things become possible and beautiful.

And when it is not heard, the babies grow up crippled and wounded, if they grow up at all. And teens hate themselves, and push that hate out onto others in bullying and rage. Or they don't see the possibilities of getting through the difficulties and the pain so they quit, they kill themselves.

Adults become hard-shelled, cold, guarded, bitter and immune to feeling.

You can read the work of Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, of Dr. Bruce Perry, of Dr. Brene Brown...and realize that greatness of heart, that resiliency, of healing possibility and vision, of a life of joy and courage and determination...these things are grounded in knowing that you are accepted, that you are enough.

That you are beloved.

That someone claims you in their heart, saying, "You are mine".

You have to learn it in your body, in your brain, through repeated experience. And it makes all the difference in the world if you do learn it, body and soul.

Jesus hears it as he climbs out of the waters of Jordan after his cousin John has baptized him.

And I'll just bet he heard it a thousand times before as well, from his mom and his dad, and maybe from grandparents, from dear friends and others who loved him.

And upon hearing, and KNOWING, that he is precious, that he is beloved, that he is claimed....it begins.

Jesus has the resources now to begin a very public, controversial and emotionally exhausting work...because he knows.

He is precious. He is valuable. He is claimed.

And so he is also strong, and resilient, and generous and brave.

When our office manager first shared the picture on the cover of your bulletin, I thought it was just OK, nothing special.

But there is something in this picture, such movement of the water! Jesus isn't climbing out of the water, he looks like he has launched himself up into the air and the sky above.

It is as if he is overflowing with energy, and in my mind, he is full of joy.

That is what being loved can do to you.

Oh sure, romantic and sexual love are full of energy and passion and joy.

But to do some daring thing that you have never done before, the power to do some amazing and hard things, this also comes from love.

Because love is also respect and admiration and wonder. So you can build a company on respect and admiration. And you can build a home on it, too.

You can, with respect towards other human beings and other creatures of this earth, build better societies.

You can fight injustice because you love justice and mercy and peace.

It has been said before that the opposite of love is not hate, it is apathy, and the sense of powerlessness.

The power of love is a driving power, a force. Jesus surges out of the Jordan River filled with it.

He is going to challenge the entire society around him...both the oppressors and the oppressed will be changed by his healing and his teaching, his blunt talk and his big vision.

Tomorrow many Americans will join in marches honoring the work and the witness of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Rev. King had a lot more years in which to work and fight than did Jesus. But both people were motivated by the fierce power of love.

Love that looks at humanity and creation with awe and respect. And then, fights for that humanity and respect for all.

It is 50 years this year since Dr. King and a host of other leaders, began their "Poor People's Campaign" and march, which he never experienced because he was murdered.

But his speeches and preaching were clear and sharp as he took his respect and awe, and turned it into his life's work of organizing for change...deep, abiding, systemic change.

In that last year of his life his speeches became more clear and focused on the absolute need to end economic injustice and the exploitation of the poor. The absolute need to destroy racism, and the economic system that was built on it. He looked at Vietnam and saw the disease of militarism eating away at our nation.

Without justice; without an end to the sins of racism, economic exploitation, and constant warfare, Martin declared a great civilization would die...because it lacked soul and commitment.

Big soul and big commitment come only with the fierceness of love; love that is awe and respect.

Jesus surges up and out of the Jordan River, and into the fierce struggle for the vision of the Kin-dom of God. He is filled with love, he knows he is loved, and love is a force...a force to be reckoned with.

So it begins...for him, for countless others who have followed Jesus...  
And it can never end...until the Kin-dom of God comes to us all.

We take up the struggle in our day and time, pushing back against the darkness of our economic oppressors, and our cruel and racist leaders...we march, we stand, we write, we fight. We befriend the unfriended, we protect the immigrant, we stand with the despised, we, too, seek to heal the sick and share the message of freedom. The message of the power of love, which is liberating, and full of awe, and wonder, and respect.

So it begins, and so it continues...  
We cannot stop...

About eight months before Rev. King was murdered, he stood before a large ecumenical gathering and spoke of our social evils and our struggles.

And these were his concluding words:

***“Let us stand in this convention knowing that on some positions, cowardice asks the question, is it safe; expediency asks the question, is it politic; vanity asks the question, is it popular; but conscience asks the question, is it right? And on some positions, it is necessary for the moral individual to take a stand that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because it is right. And we say to our nation tonight, we say to our government, we even say to our FBI, we will not be harassed, we will not make a butchery of our conscience, we will not be intimidated and we will be heard.”***

*(August 31, 1967 Address delivered at the National Conference on New Politics)*

Amen.