

March 5, 2017 – First Sunday of Lent
Get Unstuck
Mark 1:9-15

John the Baptist helps us to begin a walk toward Easter on this first weekend of Lent even though he finds himself stuck in a jail cell. Maybe that's how you feel today: stuck. Even if you're not stuck in a jail cell, you may feel like your life is walled in and not really going anywhere. Perhaps you feel stuck in your job, stuck in your marriage, stuck in school, stuck in your financial situation or even stuck in your relationship with God.

No matter where you are or how you are feeling, God wants you to know that he is with you, for you, and wants you to experience his love and grace, fresh and new today. Our God is on the move. He is anything but stuck. He invites us to know him and live our lives unstuck and in step with him through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the truth of his word found in the Bible.

One of the great opportunities that we have during this particular season of the year known as Lent is to move toward a fresh start in an intentional pursuit of Jesus. Lent is the springtime of the soul that followers of Jesus have used throughout church history as a period to pursue a fresh and focused relationship with Jesus. Lent consists of 40 days plus the seven Sundays, or 47 total days, to prepare our hearts and lives to celebrate the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus as we approach Easter. Lent is the perfect time to get "un-stuck" in your life; especially in your life with God.

Imagine what a celebration in worship could be like on Easter if we began to pursue God in a fresh way today and started to pray for him to help us get "un-stuck."

In the video, John the Baptist not only was stuck in jail, but also something else was happening. While the video helps us begin Lent, at this time in John's life his public ministry was coming to an end. Even though his ministry had ended by being stuck in prison, Jesus' public ministry was just getting started. John played a big part in this new beginning with Jesus.

The Gospel of [Mark 1:9-15](#) activates our walk toward Easter today as John the Baptist helps Jesus to prepare for his public ministry that ultimately would lead to Calvary's cross. Let's explore the passage as we walk through it together.

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

¹² The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Mark 1:9-15

It is interesting that our text begins with Jesus being baptized by John in the Jordan River. Matthew's gospel account also conveys Jesus' baptism in 3:13-17 with a bit more detail. In fact, verses 14-15 show that John was not feeling too confident about baptizing the one whom he had been preparing the way to take away the sins of the world.

"John would have prevented him [Jesus], saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he [John] consented." Matthew 3:14-15

Many questions have been asked and much has been written about why Jesus would desire to be baptized in the first place. Why would Jesus seek baptism if he had never sinned and had nothing to confess and repent of in his life? This is a fair question.

Many biblical scholars suggest when Jesus was baptized he was identifying himself with the people he came to save. Although Jesus had no sin that needed to be confessed and repented of, as those who are baptized do, Jesus was declaring his identity with human nature that is prone to weakness and sin. His walk to the cross first passed through the waters of baptism not only as an example to those he came to save from their sins, but also because of a foreshadowing of what Jesus would become on the cross. The Apostle Paul writes of this in 2 Corinthians 5 when he reminds us:

"For our sake he [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21

In a sense, Jesus became stuck in our sin so that we might become unstuck through his amazing grace by his broken body and blood that was shed as a sacrifice in our place on the cross. God's perfect plan for Jesus was to be baptized and thus "*fulfill all righteousness*" as Jesus said in Matthew 3:15. Biblical scholar Walter Wessel notes, "*All righteousness*' is a reference to God's plan and purpose for Jesus. Part of the plan was the complete identification of Jesus at the very outset of his ministry with man and his sin. This he did by submitting to baptism."

When Jesus waded into the water to be baptized he did it as a way to demonstrate that he was willing to do whatever it took not only to meet us where we are, but also to help

us get un-stuck from our sin that we might move forward in the life God desires for us to experience. Those who were present by the waters of the Jordan on that day experienced something unique and magnificent: a blessing from the Father to the Son coupled with the presence of the Holy Spirit. What a beautiful representation of the Trinity displayed in such a poignant beginning of the public ministry and mission of Jesus.

¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Mark 1:10-11

The words that God the Father spoke over Jesus the Son are echoes from both the writer of the Psalms and the prophet Isaiah.

"The Lord said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'" Psalm 2:7

These words were used with the coronation of a new King by the reigning King. A Father who was King crowning his Son as the new King to rule and reign with justice is the context from these ancient and weighty words. Thus, the words "*with you I am well pleased*" echo from Isaiah as he foreshadows the Lord's Chosen Servant and imparts the Spirit upon him.

"Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights [in whom I am well pleased]. I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations." Isaiah 42:1

This passage from Isaiah denotes the servant of the Lord who not only is being addressed, but also the divine promise of a better and new day of justice with peace is on the way. All this will come through suffering that will take place in the life of the chosen servant. Jesus would be that chosen one who would be identified as the suffering servant that would give his life for all nations on the cross.

Mark's gospel allows his readers to see that it was a gradual and slow process before Jesus' disciples became aware of the true identity of Jesus as the suffering servant who was the chosen one that would rescue them from their lives stuck in sin. This gradual understanding of the disciples that is depicted in the gospel of Mark gives hope to modern day disciples who feel stuck in their life and sin. The beginning of Lent is a great excuse to remember these truths and pursue a new beginning because of what Jesus did on our behalf. Jesus is patient and ultimately desires for all people to have a fresh start in him because of what he did at the cross to get us unstuck.

Jesus went to great lengths immediately after his baptism to prepare for the walk to the cross that he would make over the next three years.

¹²The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.” Mark 1:12-13

Numbers are significant and symbolic when mentioned in the Bible. Jesus was out in the wilderness preparing for his public ministry as he fasted and was tempted. The time he was out there was 40 days. Lent is 40 days plus 7 Sundays. Scholars suggest that Jesus lay in the tomb 40 hours after his death on the cross. The Israelites wandered 40 years in the wilderness and God flooded the earth with rain for 40 days and 40 nights.

Jim Denison has said, “Each of these historical biblical periods with 40 in it was a preparation for what was to follow.” Because Jesus prepared himself in the wilderness after his baptism and before his public ministry, we as followers of Jesus are invited and encouraged to prepare ourselves to celebrate the resurrection during this season of Lent. No matter if we feel like we have been stuck 40 days, 40 weeks, 40 months or 40 years in our proverbial wilderness, God desires for us to know he is with us and is willing to lead us out of our wilderness and into a place of new beginnings. His mercy and grace is new and in abundance for all who will call upon his name. The beginning of Lent is the perfect time to get unstuck by the power of Jesus and the truth of his word. Verse 13 notes that Jesus was “*with the wild animals*” during his period of 40 days out in the wilderness. This part of the world at that time in history was known for being populated in the wilderness areas with hyenas, jackals, panthers and even lions. It is interesting to note that lions are mentioned in two thirds of the books in the Old Testament.

For Jesus, this was a tense time of focused preparation. There was a kind of fierceness to Jesus’ entire temptation period in the wilderness. Perhaps we can relate in our own wilderness forms. For us, we may not face wild animals of the same sort as we prepare our hearts and lives for celebrating Jesus’ resurrection. Nonetheless, we may have other temptations surrounding us in our wilderness that are inhabited not by hyenas, jackals, panthers and lions. Instead, we may be feeling the presence of abusers, regrets, painful words spoken, reminders of past transgressions, wild addictions, or simple scars that remind us of complicated stories we have been a part of in days gone by. Regardless of what surrounds us in the wilderness, Jesus empowers us by his Holy Spirit and gives us direction by his Holy Word found in the pages of Scripture if we choose to heed such strengthening agents.

The final verses from our text remind us where we started and where John the Baptist was located. It also reminds us how Jesus started his public ministry.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” Mark 1:14-15

John had completed his assignment. He indeed had prepared the way of the Lord. His ministry was complete and would never be released from prison until his impending death occurred. Jesus had survived his time in the wilderness and had conquered all temptations thrown his way by his enemy, the devil. He now was ready to embark on his public ministry and thus take his first steps toward the cross.

The gospel accounts certainly will show many miraculous and demonstrative deeds done on behalf of those he came into contact with along the way. However, his first order of business that is recorded in Mark's gospel is a proclamation that he makes. *"Repent and believe."* The word for *"repent"* in the original language is *metanoia*. It means to rethink the way you think about things. It means to move forward in a new direction while leaving behind an old course. The reason Jesus calls all who would hear his voice to a new way to think and a different direction to walk is because according to him, *"the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand."*

The timing is right and the decisive hour of God's saving action in history has now come. It is the point where leadership from the Messiah and action from all who would call him "Lord" must be taken. The *"time is at hand"* means the triumph of God is now so close that the powers of evil are being opposed in successful ways. This means that evil no longer has the power to keep people stuck in their ways and trapped in their lives. Jesus has come to set people free and invite a new direction and a new season of hope and life to be experienced.

That is a message worth telling. That is a message worth sharing. That is a weight lifting word that must be experienced and enjoyed. The beginning of Lent is an opportunity that feels like starting over. This is a hope that needs to swarm every person who needs to move from being stuck to being free. This is the beginning of Lent that leads to the cross and ends in victory.

SkitGuys.com

John the Baptist: It Feels Like God is on the Move