

Most Pleased
Mark 1:11

And a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I was sitting in the office the other day just thinking about church stuff. I was thinking about this week's Scripture readings, but also church life in general. And what entered into my brain is how much we all want to be told how good we are, but that it is often so easy for us to feel disrespected.

This wasn't any new kind of revelation that I had, but it just really fit well with this week. It's the slyness of Satan. Even though we have congratulations or gifts from a job well done, Satan tries to convince us that it isn't enough. We deserve more – constant praise and reward.

Maybe you have found yourself in that position. Deep down you know others care about you. But if you don't get showered with attention you begin to think that maybe they don't like you as much as you thought. You might think you're just not that important anymore.

This is exactly how sinful desires go. They convince you that you need to be the center of the universe, or at least the center of someone else's attention. You get upset when you don't get the praise and love you want.

This is a hard sin to always see at work, since it is usually one of those sins of our thoughts. But sometimes it manifests itself in what some call passive aggressive behavior. That is, since you don't get what you want from others you're not going to give others, or do for others, what they want. I'll be honest, I've found myself with that mindset, as a son, husband, father, and pastor. I don't feel respected, so a bad mood comes over me.

Shortly thereafter I start to feel the guilt of my actions. I should have done what was right instead of thinking about myself. Instead of exhibiting Christian love I was more concerned about myself. And I realize just how terrible of a sinner I am and made those around feel not so

important. Which is the same thing in your life. Each of you is just like me. You might be more or less vocal, but you've had your own pity party. And where did it get you? No where.

This is just the reason we need Mark's Gospel. The very first sentence of the Gospel says that this is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Every word from that point forward will point to Jesus. But it is also about recognizing the sinfulness that you have. If you don't know that then you have no need for Jesus. You remain the center of your life and Jesus is, at best, secondary.

John the Baptist was given God's message that no one can be the center of his or her own life. The people of his day were intrigued by this man giving a baptism in the wilderness. As people gathered it had to be shocking to hear John saying that you had to repent of your sins to then be baptized. Scripture never tells us what ordinary people thought of this, though in other Gospels the religious leaders, like the Pharisees, are called out for their hypocrisy.

But the point John was making is one that I can state simply for you: you are not very pleasing to God. Yet you can come and confess your sins, be baptized, and God will forgive you. And forgiveness is nothing less than God's favor returning to you.

Yet even John knew he wasn't very special, even though he was a prophet. "After me comes He who is mightier than I." He's saying that he's just a servant of the Lord, doing what he has been called to do.

But then one day a man named Jesus comes by. This is the one John prophesied that would be mightier than he. Yet in Mark's Gospel this knowledge is hidden. No where does it say that John, or anyone else recognized Him. He just comes for a baptism like everyone else. It is only when He comes out of the water that the reader/hearer is let in on the secret.

Jesus is the beloved Son of God. He is the One with whom the Father is pleased. And yet Jesus has done nothing, particularly in this Gospel. John's message has been that God is not

pleased with the thoughts, words, and actions of His people. Yet this unknown man comes and God is pleased with Him.

What Mark is doing is saying to the reader/hearer – to even you – follow this Jesus. Find out why the Father is pleased with Him. When you do you'll find out what He means for you.

Throughout Mark's Gospel people are amazed at what Jesus can do. When He drives a demon out of a man people say, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." When He heals a paralytic others say, "We never saw anything like this!"

Jesus not only heals the seemingly un-healable, He states His mission: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners," which is in response to His eating with tax collectors and sinners. Later He exercises His authority over creation by calming a storm. As each teaching and miracle of Jesus builds upon the one prior people still don't get Him. But you are to see that He is the Christ, for the favor of God rests on Him because He has the Holy Spirit with Him since baptism.

It all comes to a head, as in all the Gospels, at the end. Jesus is crucified on the cross on Calvary. He has done nothing wrong to deserve it, yet He is hated by many. He is whipped so severely His flesh would be peeling off and the blood would just keep flowing. He is mocked for the claim that He is a king. He is crowned with thorns that dig into His head. Once crucified, He hangs there with a loincloth on. He's dehydrated, still bleeding, and still mocked. Then He cries out that God has rejected Him and dies. Only then a centurion says He is the Son of God.

This is what God is pleased with. Yes, the Father was pleased with His Son who healed, taught, and controlled creation. But it is at the cross where Mark allows the revelation of Jesus' identity to be known. This is whom God has sent to do something about all the sin in the world, in your life, and to make you pleasing to God.

You can spend all life doing what you think God would like you to do. But it will never earn you anything. Rather, you are called to faith in Jesus. He was baptized for the moment of His death. He was prepared to take the sins of the world on Himself so that all who believe will be saved. He died so you can have eternal life. He rose so death has no dominion over you.

It is your Baptism that makes you pleasing to God. You're pleasing not because you choose to dedicate yourself to God, but because Christ made you dead to sin and alive to God. A newness of life through Christ and the Spirit has begun in you. And it starts with trusting in Jesus. You are seen as holy and righteous. You are special and pleasing.

Which means that every time you feel unappreciated you don't have to wallow in pity. Remember what God has done for you in Baptism. You are God's own child. Jesus' perfection is given to you. His blood pays the price for all your sins and His life ended takes your punishment. His resurrection the hope of your eternal living as soul and then body in heaven with God.

Then go and serve. Filled with faith in your Lord Jesus be a pleasing sacrifice to the people around you. They need to know God will be pleased with them. Your words and actions will bring God's love to their lives.

But because of your Baptism into Jesus there is no need to feel unappreciated. God's voice has spoken to you that you are beloved, for you are forgiven and saved. His voice is your truth. Amen.