

Combined Advent Bible Study 2020

Uniting Churches in Maroondah

Study 2 - Mark 1:1-8 - Prepared by Rev Lucas Taylor

SCRIPTURE

Mark 1:1-8

1:1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

1:2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way;

1:3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"

1:4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

1:5 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.

1:6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

1:7 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.

1:8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

ABOUT THIS STUDY

You are invited to spend time reflecting on the text, images and questions individually or in groups.

You are encouraged to use each question as a launching pad for reflection or discussion. Invite the Spirit to guide the wanderings of your mind and conversation. This study is designed to offer enough space for silence and gentle progress.



LISTEN

Joel McKerrow & The Mysterious Few -
Waiting for the Storm to Break

Spotify:

<https://open.spotify.com/track/0r9BAA5BszJhE3mtz4h6kb?si=rKryKKuhSRCoVspSsbkUGQ>

Youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akjXVipTpas>

(searchable on Youtube under the name listed above)

ARISING FROM THE TEXT

Isaiah, John, and Wilderness

Isaiah 40 - A prophet in the midst of exile, but looking forward to homecoming. It is a transition, and full of hope.

John - A prophet in the midst of occupation, but looking forward to deliverance. Points to coming messiah as a sign of hope.

Wilderness - A time of transition for the people. Surrounded by death and despair, the people are given manna, nourished by God. They are also given the Law, which forms them as a people.

Photo by [Daniel von Appen](#) on [Unsplash](#)

A link in the chain

What is the “beginning” referred to here? Is this simply the first sentence of the book? Is this book the beginning of the writing about Jesus? Or is it that the life of Jesus (written about in this book) is the beginning of our understanding of God's good work in the world?

Why does a story about the future (that which follows the beginning) immediately refer back to a figure from the past - Isaiah? What significance does this figure have?

Why do you think Mark begins here, with a wild prophet in a wilderness stream?

(Consider how other Gospel accounts begin: a genealogy, a birth narrative...)



Wilderness

John embraced the wilderness. He seemed to seek it out as the appropriate site for his ministry of cleansing, and repentance... and revival?



*Cadillac Ranch, Amarillo Texas, USA. Alongside Route 66. Photo by Lucas Taylor.
Story here: <https://www.roadsideamerica.com/story/2220>*

Old cars, buried in an ancient desert, become the site of new and changing artwork.

A link in the chain.

We stand in the present; between the tidal flow of past to future.

God stands in all.

What did the wilderness offer John
distinct from the city?

What is it that cannot be discovered
apart from the wilderness?

What has the wilderness experience of
lockdown, of isolation, of disruption this
year offered us?

Wilderness is a place of struggle *and* Spirit, both problematic *and* promising. Wilderness enables us to hear the sounds of ancestors who navigated difficult terrain, preparing the way for generations to come.



Photo by [Phillip Flores](#) on [Unsplash](#)

What is to come

Clothed in camel's hair and leather, with a plate of locusts and honey nearby for a later meal, John's life speaks of One who is to come.

Who or what does our life herald?

On whose path do you walk? What paths will you leave for those who follow?

What does a God-desired future look like and how authentically does our current life herald it?

Every choice we make renders some futures more possible and other futures less possible.

The words beginning Mark's account proclaims good news amidst struggle. They promise that the future will be made better by what is unfolding in the present. They reach back into the past with the words of Isaiah to help us to perceive the voice that commands that we prepare a way in the desert/wilderness.

But the way is not ours. The way is the Lord's. And that's good news for the struggle.