

1 Lent B 2018  
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St. Matthew's Kellers Church  
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

When it comes to water, I am not “all in.” When I was 9, my parents had me take swimming lessons at the local “Y.” Backstroke was easy. I could breathe. But the stroke where you have to breathe and then stick your head in the water and exhale? When you stick your head in the water and then breathe, it's not good! I flunked the beginner's class and had to take it again. I flunked it again. In high school, we had 2 weeks of swimming sophomore year. I wound up in the advanced beginner's class (because I could already do backstroke and sidestroke – duh, they didn't involve breathing in the water, did they?). Earned a D. When I go to pools these days, I will put my feet in; walk in and bob around for a while. Do backstroke or sidestroke. Hold on to the edge and kick with my legs. I do not jump in.

In other situations I will jump in. I will jump in to help someone being bullied. I will jump in to encourage those who are discouraged. I will dance at only the hint of a really great beat. In some things I am “all in.” Our lessons today let us know what causes God to go “all in.” Under what circumstances will God jump in.

In Genesis chapter 6, God found the world full of sinners. Dreadful, unrepentant sinners. So God flooded the world, destroying all but 8 persons and the animals they brought on their ark. Gone with the sinners! God went all in, on this one. By chapter 9, our first reading for today, God had second thoughts. God decided to make a covenant with Noah and his descendants. Not a mutual agreement, “if Noah's descendants are good, then God will be good back.” No. God's covenant is one-sided; binding only on God. God's promise was that never again would God destroy the world in a flood. Three times God said “never again.” God saw sin. God hated it. God punished it. Then God relented, and had mercy. God had gone “all in” with punishment: causing rains for 40 days and 40 nights. Then, here in chapter 9, God chose mercy.

In our gospel, while Jesus is coming out of the water from John's baptism, we hear Mark's description: Jesus “saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.” We hear God's voice. And, immediately, that Spirit drove the still wet Jesus into the wilderness. The Spirit drove Jesus out – and here Mark uses the same word for exorcism. The Spirit exorcises Jesus out of the river Jordan and into the wilderness. Into the time of testing. If Jesus thought he was “all in” in the water at his baptism, he really found himself “all in” in the wilderness. For 40 days. Tempted by Satan, the accuser. But this time, during **this** 40 days of trial, the angels were with the one who was beset. God provided the angels to sustain Jesus, to wait on him. Like God provided an ark. Like God had provided a leader, Moses; and then manna. What God's people needed, God provided. For Jesus, God provided angels. And a voice saying “You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Enough to sustain Jesus as he went all in, showing God's love; doing God's will.

This is the third time in recent weeks that we have heard these beginning words of Mark's gospel. Today I call your attention to the phrase in verse 10, that Jesus, when he came up out of the baptismal water, “saw the heavens torn apart.” In Genesis, what came out of the heavens was a great flood of water; but what

came out of the heavens here in Mark's gospel was a great flood of mercy. God's mercy, poured out in Jesus. Who is “all in” in showing that mercy. Jesus is all in, in giving us God's grace.

Which we have, in abundance. A pool-full of grace. When most of us were baptized, it was into a small amount of water. We didn't have to worry about breathing underwater. But we still received an overwhelming amount of God's love and grace. The complete amount. We are fully forgiven. Fully graced. In baptism, God makes us “all in” – we are all in God's good graces. The Spirit of God is in us. Flooding us – with mercy. We are in God's mercy, up to our ne-- no, higher than that. Now, to live so much in this abundant grace that others long for what we have. We are wet with the waters of grace. God has provided us to go into the wilderness of our world, to be with the wild beasts, and to leave our wilderness different than when we came. Less violent. More honest. As though the wilderness of our world has been touched by God, who has gone all in. For it has, through Jesus and through us. Let it be so! Amen