

Spirit Driven

Mark 1:9-15

You may have read in the latest edition of our church magazine, Inside Story, that I was lucky enough to go for a spin a V8 Supercar, courtesy of Tim Blanchard, John's son. I thought I was going to black out after the initial burst of acceleration out of the pits, but I bravely fought back and enjoyed seeing a professional wrestle the car around at speeds I could hardly comprehend.



But there was more. I also had the opportunity to do a few laps of my own in a current model Commodore. I was excited but also nervous in equal measure. I didn't know the track. What if I spun off and hit something? But there was help at hand. An experienced instructor would lead us around the track. All we had to do was brake when he braked, and turn in and mirror the line he took through each corner. Trust the leader and it would all work out fine.

And it did. It was remarkable how easy and enjoyable that made each of those five laps. Sadly one driver who allowed his ambition to overtake his ability, and ended up fishtailing around turn 4 and ploughing backwards into the concrete barrier.

I learnt about how to drive smoothly and quickly that day. But I also learnt about guidance and trust. And these are lessons that apply not just to driving, but to living as a disciple of Jesus. Today's cantata teaches us about placing our trust in God's strong hand, through the life and work of his Son Jesus.

Mark's gospel is a high speed journey through the life of Jesus. There's no room for the story of Jesus' birth and childhood. It's straight down to action. First, John the Baptist's preaching and then Jesus' baptism, then his testing in the wilderness and then the work he has been called to do, to announce the good news of God in his life and words.

Each of these incidents captured by Mark gives us reasons to place our trust in Jesus. Let's start with Jesus' baptism. John was surprised to Jesus, the sinless one, the Lamb of God, purposefully coming to him and requesting "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." That Jesus wants to be baptised is utterly consistent with the purpose of his life: to be a man for others, and to embrace our humanity completely. He was born for us, and he will live fully for us. His baptism announces his arrival on the public stage.



What his baptism also shows us is the beauty of his relationship with his Father and with the Holy Spirit. We see the Triune God working together in love. "As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven opened and the Spirit descending on him like a dove." And then Jesus receives the affirmation of his Father: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."



These words were not spoken just for Jesus' benefit but for ours too. They encapsulate the heart of the good news that Jesus goes on to proclaim; that God shares his life, his very being and nature with us. Through baptism we "receive the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." The same Spirit that descended on Jesus takes up residence in our lives. We have a leader, an advocate, a counsellor who lives within. Not only that but we have been made part of the body of Christ. And even more, the Father has spoken over us the same words of love: "You are my

Son, you are my daughter, whom I love, with you I am well pleased."

Jesus says to us today, "Repent and believe the good news." What do we need to repent of? Perhaps the idea that we are self-sufficient individuals, able to cope alone with everything life throws up at us. For some people, the thought that we are alone in the driver's seat is a liberating one. Yet we have so much trouble steering ourselves around the track which is our lives. Corners come upon us one after another. We often arrive at them far too fast. We haven't given enough thought to the choices in front of us. Other times we know the direction that we should steer if we want to continue on course with God, but we lose traction and slide off the track into the wall. There's plenty of damage: to us, our pride, our relationships.



The good news is that God's love is far broader than any and all of our faults. That's what Jesus teaches by word and shows by his action. The kingdom of God is about healing, comfort, hope and life in the face of death. Even at the point of his own death, Jesus entrusts himself to the Father he knows loves him, and his Father displays the power of his endless love in raising Jesus to new life. The cross of Jesus proclaims is that God's commitment to the human race is unbreakable

Living as a disciple has its twists and turns. The road of life can be slippery and dangerous. I can push us to, or beyond our limits. But remember that you are never alone in the driver's seat. In Jesus you have a Lord and Saviour who knows the course and who knows you intimately, in whom you can trust

implicitly.

“Sing, pray and be prepared to follow
with faithfulness along life’s way,
and trust the heavenly Father’s blessings:
then you will find them new each day.
For those who trust in God to lead,
he never will forsake in need.” Amen.