

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

### **Title: Reflect, Shake Up, Tweak, and Redesign**

#### **Lesson: Mark 1:4-11**

*<sup>4</sup>And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. <sup>6</sup>John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup>I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with<sup>Ⓢ</sup> the Holy Spirit." <sup>9</sup>At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

The new year has arrived. Last week was on December 31st, and today is already January 7th. Although it seems like just another typical week, there's a notable distinction between last week and today. Last week belonged to 2023, but now we find ourselves in 2024. So, people often greet each other on the end of December by saying "See you next year," and in the new year, they might jokingly say, "It feels like it's been a whole year!"

After the New Year began, as I sat in my office chair, I felt blessed. Yes, I feel blessed to be serving alongside the church members who have deep love and passion for our parish, contributing together to serve this parish. Throughout the past week, I had the chance to exchange New Year greetings with some parishioners. They inquired, "Happy New Year Pastor, by the way, what's your creative and new plan for Lent?" Well... we just said goodbye to 2023. And now, the new year has just begun. Especially, yesterday was Epiphany, and we are in the season of Epiphany. And, Ash Wednesday falls on February 14<sup>th</sup>. Did you see their passion and love for our parish? They are preparing for the future. I feel blessed by their passion for ministry.

As they asked for my plan for Lent, I would like to share my thoughts. Reflecting on the past three years during the Lenten Season, I've looked back on what we've done. In 2021, we had a Lenten Service through Zoom with the book titled "Savior." In 2022, our circuit pastors offered Lenten devotionals. We had a Lenten Service through Zoom with the devotionals. Last year, We had an in-person Lenten Bible study using Adam Hamilton's 'Luke,' accompanied by Soup and Sandwich. I came to realize that in the previous Lenten season, we focused somewhat on intellectual and theological aspects. Of course, I don't deny the importance of gaining a deep understanding of the meaning of the cross and the Savior, as well as exploring the profound aspects of Luke through theological studies.

**(Slide 1)** But, I've been thinking, what if we concentrate on the spiritual aspects, especially prayer, this Lent? Interestingly, our conference has suggested a book for this Lent called 'Dynamite Prayer.' Our Bishop and the Cabinet plan to read it during the Lenten season and have invited us to join. The great part is, if we accept this invitation, we can enjoy a 50% discount on the book. I'll share more details with you soon.

I'm still praying about what we'll do during the Lenten Season through this book. What's certain is that this year, every Wednesday during Lent, we'll gather for Soup and Sandwich. At this point, what I have in mind isn't focused on a Lenten service or a Bible study; instead, it's more about creating a space for sharing our everyday experiences of God's presence. During the season of Lent, I hope that we can read a set portion each week, pray, and reflect on how we felt God's presence in our lives and where we experienced God's grace throughout the week. I want us to take time to prepare and share these reflections. So, the time I envision isn't a sermon where the pastor speaks unilaterally, nor is it a time for someone to teach theological knowledge. It's simply a time for us, as Christians, to share about our faith and lives based on trust and respect. For this, I've been praying in the new year.

How's everyone feeling in the new year? Did you come up with any resolutions? I've googled and gathered the top New Year's resolutions for 2024 from a survey: 1. To save more money, 2. To exercise more, 3. To eat healthier, 4. To spend more time with family and friends, 5. To lose weight, 6. To cut down on living expenses like food and energy, 7. To spend less time on social media, 8. To reduce stress on the job.

Do your resolutions somewhat match this list, or do you have some differences?

One of my New Year's resolutions is to make time for reflection. During the Christmas holiday, I attended the Korean Caucus Annual Gathering in Wisconsin Dells, where Bishop was also present. On the second evening, we had a conversation session with Bishop. One of the pastors asked Bishop if he had any advice for us, and his response has stayed with me. He encouraged each pastor to listen attentively to our inner, authentic voices.

**(Slide 2)** The instant I heard his words, it brought to mind silkworms. I'm not sure if there are silkworms in Wisconsin, but silkworms eat mulberry leaves and produce silk threads. The silk thread is a unique creation of silkworms. Only silkworms can produce silk threads. No one else can make silk threads on behalf of silkworms. It made me reflect and pose a question to myself: What is Hakki Min's existential and unique theology as someone who reads the Bible? What is Hakki Min's existential and unique spiritual journey?

To seek answers to these questions, I'm planning to incorporate regular moments of reflection into my life throughout this year. Specifically, I want to periodically contemplate aspects like my relationship with God, my relationship with ministry, my relationship with myself, and my relationship with my family. I aim to document these reflections in a journal.

In 2024, it may be a familiar and ordinary year for some, but for others, it could be a year of significant shake-ups, tweaks, and redesigns in their lives. As we embark on this new year, I hope for your lives to be shaken up, tweaked, and redesigned within the embrace of Christ.

**(Slide 3)** Mark 1 shares the account of Jesus undergoing baptism. The Son of God took on a baby's form in Bethlehem. The Jesus narrative we commonly know focuses on His birth or events post the age of 30. Details about Jesus as a child, teenager, or in his twenties are scarce. The Baptism of Jesus story signifies the commencement of His ministry.

Considering the limited documentation from ages 1 to 29, it appears Jesus led a fairly ordinary life, not markedly different from others. However, he devoted a significant period preparing to fulfill God's will. Eventually, he journeyed to Galilee, seeking out John the Baptist, and humbly requested baptism.

As Jesus received baptism from John in Galilee, he saw heaven being torn open, and the Spirit descended upon him like a dove. A voice from heaven declared: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you, I am well pleased.' (11) This divine proclamation marked the beginning of Jesus' ministry as the Son of God on earth, at the same time becoming the moment when Jesus' life was shaken up, tweaked, and redesigned.

Friends, today is the first Sunday of 2024, and it's Baptism of the Lord Sunday. I hope your year ahead will be different from the past ones, perhaps a bit more special. I hope in your faith journey, your heavens will be torn open, the Spirit will descend upon you, and you'll attentively listen to your authentic inner voice. So that our journey of faith may be shaken up, tweaked, and redesigned in Christ. Amen.