Good morning family of Trinity on Jackson, it is good to be with you for two Sundays in a row. Even though you and I are just beginning our relationship with one another, our ministry together and getting to know one another better, we are also beginning another new beginning and that is the journey of Lent. Last Wednesday was Ash Wednesday. We had a beautiful service where Brian preached and just did an excellent job. I hope you were able to see that online and today is the very first Sunday in Lent. Lent can be a difficult journey for some, because it calls us to begin to look at our life and how we're living it for Jesus, to look at the ways in which things sometimes have crept in that we know maybe that's not exactly what God desires for us. So today, I want to look at the scripture about another new beginning and this new beginning is the beginning of Jesus's earthly ministry. We find that in the book of Mark, the first chapter, starting at verse nine. Let us read this scripture together and hear what it is that God desires for us, and how we live our adventure in Lent, let us hear the word of the Lord.

9 One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. 10 As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.”

12 The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, 13 where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him.

14 Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God’s Good News. 15 “The time promised by God has come at last!” he announced. “The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!”

Now there is a lot in just those short few scriptures. Just in those verses alone, we have the baptism of Jesus, we have the dove, we have the voice of God, we have him going out into the wilderness and we have him beginning his preaching Ministry of the good news. A lot in just a few verses. So I'd like us to kind of work through some of these verses and see what pieces or nuggets that God might have for you, and also for me today. So let's start at the beginning. One, Jesus came from Nazareth. Well, guess what? Everybody's got to come from somewhere. And sometimes the places where we come from, we can carry a little bit
of baggage. Even Jesus carried some baggage from Nazareth, because scripture asked the question, could anything good come out of Nazareth, and yet here was Jesus, the best of the best, and he was coming out of Nazareth. Now he went down to the Jordan River. Now the Jordan River is just an ordinary river. It's not even as big as the St. Joe River here. There really isn't any symbolism to it. It's just an extra-large creek.

And yet, that's where John baptized Jesus, baptism. Now, baptism is not new for you or me. But it was new for Jesus. Now, for you or me, adult baptism has to do with the cleansing or washing away of our sin, that we might live in new life in Jesus.

Now, we know that in infant baptism, the child is marked by God until the day in which they receive for themselves and confirmation, their new life in Christ.

But what we're talking about here, this is adult baptism. So Jesus was washed one way or another, it might have been sprinkling it might have been dunking, it doesn't matter. All we know is that water was used.

But the question is, why?

Why did Jesus need to be baptized? What did Jesus have that needed to be washed away? You see, Jesus was sin less. He had never sinned whatsoever. So Jesus was sinless than why did he need to be baptized? Well, the reason that Jesus was baptized was so that he would fulfill his mission on earth and to do his father's will.

It all had to do with the understanding of Covenant. Here's what John Wesley has to say in his treaties on Baptism.

It was initiated in the room of circumcision. For us, that was a sign and seal of God's covenant. So is this. You see, baptism is a sign of the covenant; it's the sign that we are part of the family. Do you know if you're truly a part of the family of God? I mean, really, do you have certainty that you're part of God's family. But one of the ways you can know that is through baptism, because baptism is a sign of the covenant. Now, baptism has nothing to do with salvation that's between you and Jesus. There is not a single action except receiving him that you need do.
But baptism is the outward sign of an inward change, or the outward sign of an inward grace. That Grace is the grace of Jesus. See the outward sign that Jesus has already done something inside of us. That we have already received Him as our Lord and Savior, and we desire to live for Him. We're part of the family.

We are part of that new covenant, a new covenant of grace, established in Christ. And that's why Christ has asked us as a sacrament, to all participate, to show the world that we are part of the family of God. That's why baptism is important that everybody out there knows the difference that Jesus has made inside of us. And so, Jesus was baptized and he asked us to be baptized as well.

But the scripture goes on. It talks about that after Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River. As he came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending upon him like a dove. No, it doesn't say that it was a dove, it says it was like a dove. It's just the writer trying to help us to understand what happens. But what we know is the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus. Do you know the Holy Spirit descended upon us as well? Not like a dove, not something that we could physically see. But that moment when I receive Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit came and literally dwells within me. That's right; I am the holy dwelling place of God. And so are you.

It's that Holy Spirit that empowers us to live a life of obedience to Jesus. I can't do it on my own. In my own in my own flesh, there's only weakness, I can do hardly anything, trust me. But in God's power, in God's power, I am amazed at what I'm capable of doing. And the same is true for you.

So the Holy Spirit came down and descended upon Jesus and looked like it was a dove and then there was a voice. The voice said, “You are my dearly loved Son and you bring me great joy”.

You know, this is one of those texts, where we literally have the Trinity all three, in one spot. You've got Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God the Creator in the voice all in this one text. It is pretty incredible. But the voice reminds us of whom Jesus is.

You see, some people think that Jesus was a really good teacher, some people say he might have been a prophet. Jesus was more than that. Jesus is the Son of God, for Jesus is God.
And that's important for all of us to understand and to know. You see, that voice made it clear to every single person who is hearing that day. I hope it makes it clear to every person hearing even now. For we need to understand that Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus pleased God because Jesus desired to do the will of the Father in every single way, and never sinned, not once. No wonder God was pleased with him.

And that's the same God that I want to follow. That’s the same God that I want to be obedient to, not some good teacher or some Prophet, no, God who came to earth in human form, Jesus, that's who I want to follow, and none other and I hope that's who you want to follow as well, because that journey is a journey like no other. It’s this time in Lent that we begin to ask the questions, who am I following? How well am I doing while I'm following? Do I truly understand who Jesus is? If I do, how am I being obedient to Him In all of my actions and all of my words, in everything that I put on the internet? How am I honoring him and honoring the relationship that I have with him?

Well, after the voice is done speaking, it says that the Holy Spirit compelled Jesus to go out into the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan for 40 days. Forty days, that's a long time. He was out among the wild animals and the angels took care of him. I don't know what wild animals were out there in Jesus's day, but I know not all of them would have been ones that would have been happy to see me. Because there were dangerous animals out there. But I don't think that they were dangerous to Jesus. Why? Because he was the son of God, they would have understood exactly who he was. He wasn't under any threat by those wild animals. The angels attended him while he was out there. How did they do that? I don't know maybe they gave him a backrub every once a while, I don't know. But what I know is they cared for him. He was never alone.

And this is why this scripture is so important to us. Hear this from Hebrews 4: 15:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

You see, Jesus was out there for 40 days, being tempted. He understands when we're under temptation and I know there are temptations. Why, because I've got my own temptations in my own life and I know you face them as well.
Because the Holy Spirit dwells in us, because we have the empowering of the Holy Spirit, that means we literally have the power, not to sin, quite literally, we have been empowered to live in obedience to Christ, into every area of our life. Yet I know because I've done it, too. I've sinned. Sometimes I've sinned pretty well. But I know the grace of God is there in the midst of that, to forgive me. But it never gives me the right just to go out and do whatever I want to do and sin in any way that I can. I need to live in obedience to Christ.

I need to seek that obedience to Christ. Now granted, when I slip, when I fall, God is there in his grace to pick me up and send me off again. Hopefully, I've learned from that so that I don't sin that way again. Now, there's gonna be 40 other ways that I'm going to do it. I understand. But the Holy Spirit is there. And as I grow in obedience to Christ, I learn how to listen to the Holy Spirit as a counselor in my life, hopefully, more and more, I am sinning less and less. That's my discipleship, like growing in faith.

Jesus didn't have to grow in faith. He was faith. So for 40 days, he didn't sin. But you and I, we have, but that's when it goes back to the message that Jesus gave.

You see, when he came out of the wilderness, he started his preaching ministry and one of the first things that he talked about was repentance, the power of repentance. Do you know the power of repentance in your life? Remember when we talked about all of sinning, hopefully, we sinned less?

Well, repentance isn't just a feeling where I'm sorry about the sins that I've committed. No. Repentance says that I turn from that sin literally. When the sin is in front of me, I turn from it and I go in the opposite direction. That's obedience to Christ.

Jesus knows we sin, His grace abounds. But he calls you and me into repentance. To let go of whatever that sin is to turn from it and to live in new life in Him.

It means that I can let go of anything that's in my past. I can let go of any of the baggage that is in my life. I don't have to be held hostage to feelings of inadequacy, feelings of I'm a horrible person, understanding the penalty for my sin. I don't have to hold on to any of that because when I repent and I seek God's forgiveness, he pours out His forgiveness as he pours out His grace upon me. But I'm called to repentance.
That's why I've got to continually look at my life in Christ and see where things have slipped in. Because sometimes they just do that without me realizing it. Things that are not of God, ways of living and doing that are not of God and I need to repent from those things. Not just feel sorry for them, but literally turn from them to live a new life in him.

That's what repentance is all about and that's what Jesus brings us in his preaching. For the time promised by God has come at last, The kingdom of God is near repent of your sins and believe the good news, the good news, that God forgives you of your sins, that Jesus will die has died, to pay the penalty for those sins. So you're no longer entrapped by them because you have been set free. That is the good news.

So what are the things that you need to repent of? What are the things that you need to change in your life? I know some of them are hard. But remember, the Holy Spirit is with you, to empower you. You don't have to do it alone. You don't have to do it just in your own power, do it in the Holy Spirit and in his power.

To live the life that he desires for you. Why? Because the kingdom of God is at hand. That's what Jesus says. The kingdom of God is here. He said that you don't have to die and wait to see all that God has for you. You can live that now. Eternal life starts when we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. I'm living in that now the same way that you are or that you can be. Eternal life now, living a life for Christ now, receiving the joy of Christ.

All of that we find in this one little itty bitty scripture. I pray that is good news for you. Because there may be one or more of you right now that you feel like you're living in death.

You feel like, if anyone knew the sins I've committed and all the things in my life, they wouldn't want to have anything to do with me.

You are wrong. Jesus wants everything to do with you. He lived for you, and He died for you. Death was arrested when my new life began. And life began with Jesus. And that new life can begin for you today.

If you want to hear more about that, or you need more of an explanation, call me anytime. I'd love to have coffee with you, although I'm a tea drinker and we'll talk more about that. Because I want you to live in the joy of the Lord and to experience all that God has for you. So let death be arrested and let your new life begin. Amen.