Let us Pray.

Lord may these words from my lips and this meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight. Amen.

Church is about saving lives and our actions truly matter…

I had the great privilege of being trained as a first aider…and a mental health first aider….as we come to church today….be that in person or online…..we too are being trained through the good news of scriptures to save lives.

Medical first aid is one of those things that we should all consider learning….yet you will not be alone if you fear the possibility of having to use that knowledge….Not that long ago myself and others within my previous church had to step up and use those skills….

The sermon had just started…I wasn’t preaching….and a good friend of the church slumped in his pew…his heart had stopped….We called the ambulance….but time was of the essence….we started heart massage and grabbed the defib…..he was shocked 6 times before the ambulance arrived….as they arrived we managed to get him breathing again….he is alive today because there were people in that church family who had trained….who had listened…..who were not afraid to step up when others could only watch and pray……**actions matter**…..

Our Gospel reading today comes from Mark…..and Mark doesn’t waste time in getting down to business……a single sentence introduces this Gospel…..I love the way Eugene Peterson translates it in the Message….Mark says: The Good News of Jesus Christ….The Message…begins here!!

And throughout the whole gospel mark does not deviate from that message….the Good News!!!

An event has taken place that radically changes the way we look at and experience the world, and he can't wait to tell us. There's an air of breathless excitement in nearly every sentence he writes…. the sooner we get the message, the better off will be…. for the message is good, incredibly good…. God is here and he's on our side….. Mark, understandably, is in a hurry to tell us what happened in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus . These events that reveals the truth of God to us, so that we can live in reality and not in illusion.

Jesus came to save us….not with a defib or with skills in first aid… but he jumped into the waters of sinful humanity to bring us back to life.

How did it happen? Did he come riding into the city on a white charger, sword in hand…..or what about a tank armed with high explosives….aimed at the city walls……No, God the father first sent a man named John.

John was well ahead of his time….missional….focused not just on the spiritual health….but eating locusts and wild honey….wearing handmade clothes which will have been very itchy…..nowadays people would pay good money for such a spiritual retreat experience…..

This man was quite the sight to behold…..and he was doing something that….well It would be an understatement to say John the Baptist was fighting an uphill battle….He didn’t just break the norms of society with his clothes and willingness to eat whatever came his way…. He also broke with all religious traditions…He was baptizing Jews. Why??? It wasn’t the done thing….In John’s day baptism was for Gentiles who wanted to become Jews…. He was calling people to repent and change their behaviour, asking them to be baptized……**Actions Matter**

As you can imagine, John wasn’t a softly softly preacher…. He offered a fire-and-brimstone call to repentance, challenging people to change their behaviour, to prepare the way for Messiah….not a message for the faint hearted….but still they flocked to him for baptism.

Jesus too came to John…….Mark tells us that Jesus travelled from Nazareth to the Jordan River. Once there, Jesus steps into the water, for a baptism He didn’t need, to save people who didn’t deserve it.

Jesus was implementing God’s plan to save God’s people….the same people who had broken His commandments.

Picture the scene. Hot and dusty…on the banks of the river…. Large crowds…… John preaching…. you can almost hear the shouting and the aggressive style of preaching…….COME CONFESS YOUR SINS….RECEIVE BAPTISM……COME NOW…..THE TIME IS SHORT…..THE MESSIAH IS COMING…..HURRY…

And they came……People confessing their sins and being baptized.

Then Jesus steps into the water.

Water dripping from his hands, John proclaimed:

“**Behold** the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

READ FROM THE MESSAGE\*\*\*\*\*

Jesus’ coming….this carpenter….he will change us from the inside out…….But who is this man John to tell us of such things….he isn’t God!!

And as if God knew there would be people who still needed to be convinced….he sends irrefutable proof…..mark tells us;

’The moment he (Jesus) came out of the water, john saw the sky open and God’s spirit, looking like a dove, come down on him. Along with the spirit, a voice. “you are my son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life”

Marked by my love……..pride of my life…..True passion!....Heart-breaking also as we know…just as God knew what was to come…..what more proof is needed!

Stepping out of the waters of the Jordan, the dripping wet Saviour stands before the crowds….Jesus had been baptized by John and this event publicly proclaims to the world that the Son of God is entering the battle to save sinful humanity from sin, eternal death and the power of the devil. By His baptism He enters the waters of our sinful lives, so that by His sinless life, His sacrificial death, and His miraculous resurrection…might see our lives saved…..Jesus is my life saver…..**actions matter**

But we are also called to save ourselves through repentance……John was calling people to repent and we here Jesus himself beginning his ministry with the words: “Repent the kingdom of heaven has come.”

But what is repentance…….C.S. Lewis has this definition of “repentance”.

“Fallen man(kind) is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor…. That is the way out of our “hole”. This process of surrender…. This movement full speed in reverse gear… is what Christians call repentance.

Now repentance is no fun at all. It is something much harder than merely eating humble pie. It means unlearning all the self-conceit and self-will that we have been training ourselves into for thousands of years.” (C.S. Lewis)

Jesus is calling us to stand in front of the mirror and be honest. In Jesus we see how beautiful God made you and me and that life is better if we follow Him. **Actions Matter**

Through Jesus’ coming and baptism in the Jordan we see that God is here right now, and on our side, actively seeking to help us in the way we most need help……this really does qualify as **good news…..**

And the good news of the gospel is that we can do nothing to make ourselves more acceptable to God over and above what Jesus has already done for us. We can-not add to what Jesus has done, nor can we take away from it.

Mark’s Gospel to some is simply a collection of words on a page….maybe to some it is a good or even a great story….a fairy tale……But to those who believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour, Mark’s Gospel tells us how to save lives….how to save our own lives….not with defibs or ambulances…but with faith..Mark doesn't want us to waste a minute of our precious lives being ignorant of this most practical of all matters……that through the grace of God, our eyes are opened to the reality that God is passionate to save us…. and he has sent his son to do just that. **Actions Truly Matter. Alleluia**

Amen