

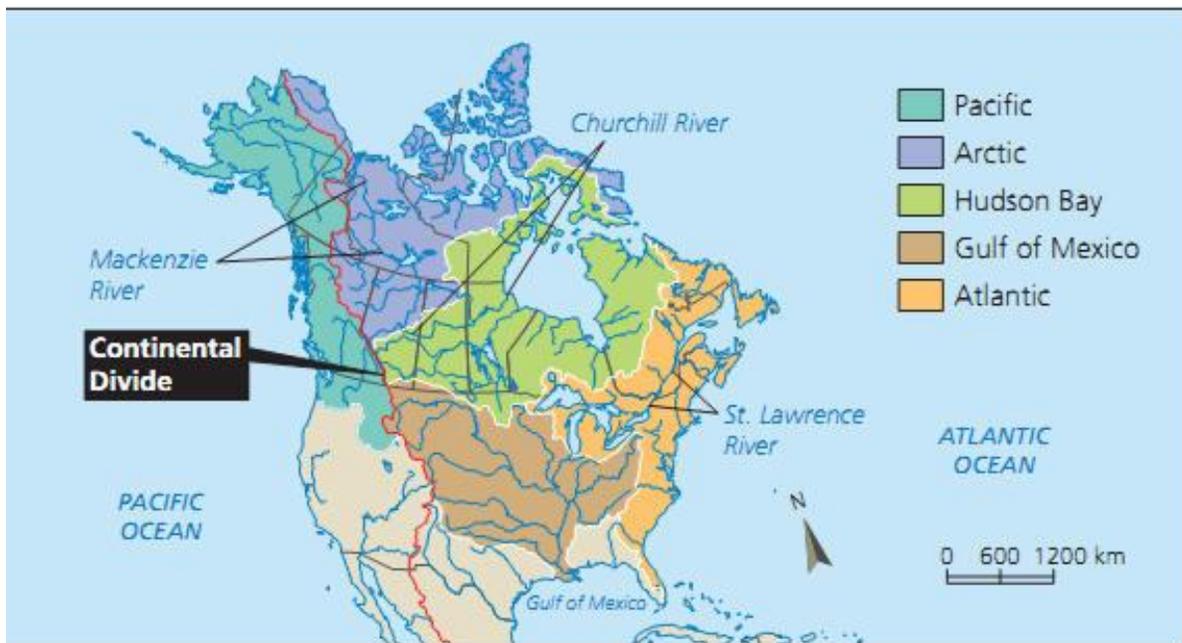
“Watershed”

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Mark 1: 4-11

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I’ve called my sermon ‘Watershed’. A watershed moment is a moment that changes you, that changes things, and maybe that changes everything. Sometimes people look back in history and see watershed moments — like the invention of the printing press or the small engine, or an event like the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand that sparked the beginning of World War I. A few months ago, I preached about Martin Luther nailing the 95 theses to the cathedral doors, which set in motion the Protestant Reformation and had massive consequences. These are watershed moments. We have watershed moments in our lives too.

Do you know what a watershed is? One definition of a watershed is the geographic phenomenon where water flows away from the divide. In Canada we have 5 main watersheds. West of the continental divide, the water flows to the Pacific Ocean. East of the divide it flows to the Arctic or to Hudson Bay or the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Ocean. Have you ever driven the Trans-Canada highway from Alberta to BC? If you have, you have driven over or through the continental divide.



For a lot of the highway you drive next to a river, and it is clearly flowing in one direction. However, as you drive along, you notice that at a certain point the water is flowing the other way. We drove that route several times

because we lived in Alberta for 8 years and had some family in BC that we occasionally visited. Each time, I was fascinated by this divide and the point at which the water goes the other way.

It's a bit like standing on the equator, which I did 6 years ago on a trip with Our Kenyan Kids. They did this little experiment on the equator where they had a funnel and they poured water through the funnel into a bucket on the ground. When we stood a meter or so north of the equator, the water rotated *clockwise*. We then moved a meter or so south of the equator and did the same thing, and the water rotated through the funnel *counterclockwise*. We then stood on the equator itself, and the water just went *straight through the funnel!*

In a way, every New Year we stand on that spot. I think that's why everyone likes the New Year's Eve thing — even though in reality nothing much changes from December 31st to January 1st except trying to remember to write 2018. There is a feeling of standing on the threshold between one place and another.

Now physically, we have no choice about moving forward. Time marches on and day by day and year by year we have no choice but to move on with it. Physically there is not much choice about moving into the future. But emotionally and spiritually, there is a lot that we do have a choice about. We have a choice about whether we will stay and cling to the past in our regrets, our memories, our losses. We have a choice about whether we will embrace the uncertainties of the future, or be dragged fearfully and against our wills to a place we don't want to go.

The lectionary — the set of readings for the church year which we loosely follow—always begins the New Year with the baptism of Jesus. It seems an appropriate way to begin, because this is the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. In a way, this is when Jesus '*comes out*' to the world as the son of God.

The arrival of Jesus on the scene is a watershed moment — arguably the biggest in history. Even our dating system is centered around Jesus: BC: before Christ, and AD: "Anno Domini" the year of our Lord. Many places have changed that dating to be CE: Common Era and BCE: before the Common Era. That doesn't change the fact that originally the dates were set around the arrival of Jesus.

In the Old Testament, the scriptures all seem to be leading up to the birth of Jesus. This was the moment they were all waiting for. My father preached last Sunday about that waiting, and how Anna and Simeon waited a lifetime for the arrival of Jesus. As long as the waiting was, the day finally arrived. Jesus arrived quietly, as we read in the Christmas story, and then 30 years later he arrived on the scene publicly. His baptism is like the

inauguration, the debut of his ministry. But in classic Jesus style, the arrival, the inauguration is subtle and even humble.

Baptism has a whole lot of symbolism, but there are three parts of it that I think are important to us today as we stand at the edge of the water.

The first is repentance. John preached that baptism was about **repentance**. It was a baptism for the forgiveness of sins. What is repentance? Repentance is turning toward God. It's starting over. It's the spiritual detox. Our culture is into detox diets, especially at this time of the year. I don't think there is a lot of scientific evidence to support most of the detox diets. What is better is simply to drink more water, eat healthier — more vegetables and fruits and less sugary foods, and exercise a bit more. That's all the detox you need to get your system working better. (I know 'easier said than done!') Baptism is a bit like the spiritual detox. It's where you hit the restart button. It's where you own up to the crap in your life and say I'm sorry.

"I'm sorry, God. My relationship with you, my relationship with other people, my relationship with your creation and the parts of creation that are supposed to be a blessing; and even my relationship with myself, I've abused. There are parts of these relationships that are bad and harmful and toxic to myself and to others."

The only way to fix some of our problems is to start by admitting and owning up to them and saying "I'm sorry", "Forgive me". Do you know that God can help you with those parts and places that are bad, that are weak; that are a mess? Own up to your part and hand the mess to God. God promises that he will forgive you and set you free. The process is not always instant, but if you are willing to follow and put in the work, God will lead you to a place of health and freedom.

The next part of the baptism that is important for us is the **blessing**. When Jesus came up from the water, the Holy Spirit was present and filled him. Jesus heard the words of his father telling him that he was loved, and that God was proud of him. You know God loves you too. That blessing is not just for the Son of God, that blessing is for each one of us. God is proud of you. He's proud of what he created and he's proud of so much of who you are currently, and proud of your potential. I wonder, can you feel that pride? What is God proud of you for?

The final aspect is the **commitment**. For Jesus himself, the baptism was a symbol of committing to living the life he was born to lead. It was far from easy, but he was born to show us the love of God, to heal and set us free from all the chains and the prisons we are trapped in. This was a journey that would involve amazing blessings, miracles and life, but also incredible suffering — especially his death on a cross. Stepping into the waters of the Jordan River was his way of owning and committing to that call on his life. I do

believe Jesus had a choice. He could not have set us free if he himself was not free.

Baptism for us is about choice and commitment. It is the way we stand and say “I choose to follow you, Jesus. I choose to be a member of the church and give of myself so that others will know the love of God, receive healing, and be set free from all that enslaves them.”

I came across this video on Facebook a little while ago. Today is Orthodox Christmas- – Merry Christmas to our Orthodox brothers and sisters in Christ! Here is how some Russian Orthodox do baptism.

Check out this video of God’s Frozen Chosen: <https://youtu.be/ZvwQiHRe8q8>
(The picture gives you an idea!)

What do you say we head down to the frozen river after church, cut a hole and have a baptism? We always have a baptism in the summer in the river ... why not in the winter? I’m kidding of course, but I tell you it gives a whole new understanding of commitment!



Watershed. In the New Year we start by going back to the source and back to that sacred point where it begins. It begins in the water that washes away our shame, our hurts, and our sin, and cleanses us for new life. It begins with a blessing. It begins with reminding us that we are beloved. You are a child of God and precious in God’s sight. It begins in a place of commitment that says ‘*This is the path I choose to take—the one that follows Jesus.*’ Just like the waters, we don’t know where exactly the path will take us or where we will end up, but we know the source. Jesus said “I am the way and the truth and the life”. Let us follow.

I am going to give you an opportunity to go back to that point, to your baptism. It might be the first time for some of you to stand at that point and say “Yes, this I choose”.

First I invite you just to close your eyes and to remember the past, remember the immediate past...2017, remember the more distant past... Remember the good memories and blessings of the past... *remember and give thanks.*

Next I want you to hold up the past, the recent and the distant, and call to mind the parts you regret—the places where you were not your best self, where you messed up and let others, God or yourself down. *Repent, ask forgiveness,*

Call to mind when other people or institutions let you down or hurt you... *as able, forgive those people (not excusing or forgetting the injury but setting yourself free from that hurt).*

Now I invite you to think of the future and the year ahead. I invite you to place this year and your future into God's hands. Ask God to guide you and give you strength.

If you would like, I am now going to invite you to renew your baptismal vows and renew your commitment to follow Jesus.

Baptism Renewal

Do you believe in God and in his love? **-Yes I do**

Do you believe that God has made himself known to us in Jesus of Nazareth, who lived, and died and rose again, and do you now give your life to Him?

-Yes I do

Do you believe that Jesus Christ, by his Holy Spirit, is alive and present to guide you, help you, and strengthen you? **-Yes I do**

Do you commit yourself, with God's help, to be a follower of Jesus Christ, and in so doing belong to God forever?

- Yes I do, God helping me

Do you promise to try to live and act with kindness, caring, understanding, - "treating others as you would like to be treated", as Jesus taught us?

- Yes I do, God helping me

Do you promise to be an active member of Christ's body, which is the Church, in worship, prayer, and the study of God's word? Do you promise to love and support the Church with your gifts and abilities as best you can?

- Yes I do, God helping me

Prayer after Baptism Renewal

Lord God, you revealed your Son in the waters of the Jordan and anointed him with the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim good news to all people. Sanctify us by the same Spirit, that we may proclaim the healing power of the gospel by acts of love in your name. Amen.

... Now remember and receive God's blessing

Blessing

The LORD bless you and keep you;

the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.