

**Ephesians 5: 15-20**  
**Mark 1: 9-15**  
**February 18, 2018**  
**Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church**  
**Music Appreciation Sunday**

In this time of emerging spiritual awareness, we constantly are being told to slow down and “Be still and know that I am God.” In this hectic, driven world such a message is more than important. Our response to it is literally a matter of life and death. Make no mistake; I am not only speaking of spiritual life and death. The death toll from addiction, stroke, heart attack, suicide and the rest is a terrible witness to the cost of forgetting God’s presence. In the end, the life and death of the soul and that of the body are intimately tied together.

Isn’t it interesting, then, that the atmosphere of both Paul’s letter to the Ephesians and the opening chapter of Mark’s Gospel is infused with urgency: the time is short! Distance yourselves from the evil of the world. Walk in the light of Christ! Make melody in your heart! In Mark that takes the other evangelists chapters to record takes only a handful of verses. From the abrupt beginning: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ,” to the end the language is compact. Not a syllable more than is necessary is used. It is as if Mark is pressed for time. It is as if he is afraid he won’t complete his gospel before Jesus returns and the time for people to respond to the good news will be past.

In the passage we just heard Jesus is baptized *and immediately* the Holy Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness where he is tempted by Satan. In the next section, Jesus will say to some local fishermen “Follow me;” *and immediately* they dropped their nets and followed him.

We live in an either/or world. Either we are at rest *or* we are active. So we wonder, “How can we be still *and be active*? How can we live active lives *and* allow the Shepherd to make us lie down in green pastures and lead us beside still waters?” On this music appreciation Sunday let me make this observation: People who are driven by pressure outside of themselves neither make appreciate music or make music—at least *what I would call music*. When I feel driven by the tyranny of “do this or else” I tend to feel stressed out, helpless and useless. When this happens, music becomes the outward expression of my inner experience of being out of control. I am drawn to loud electric music from my teenage past: Led Zeppelin, Moby Grape, Cream, Jimi Hendrix and the rest. But this is not music appreciation. It is another form of venting. In my mellower years I recognize musical venting at a stop light when I am bombarded by the battering bass line of the car next to me. At hockey games when loud hostile songs are blared into the arena I innocently wonder, “Why not play a Bach Brandenburg concerto instead? Why not have Nina Zanello play her mountain dulcimer at halftime of the Super Bowl?”

The answer to this naïve question is that loud and angry music not only vents our inner turmoil, it also prevents us from hearing the still small voice which is lonely and frightened and is crying for help.

In this context, notice that Mark records that after Jesus’ baptism, the Spirit “*immediately drove him out to the wilderness.*” The Greek word translated “drove” is *ekballo*. It literally means to be “cast out” as a stone is thrown. I’m guessing that when you hear this, your reaction similar to mine—that Jesus is being thrown like a rock into the wilderness. He has no will of his own. He is just a puppet in the plan of God, the great Puppeteer.

This might be the case if not for the fact that the same Spirit has just descended upon and into the soul of Jesus in his baptism. This is critically important because it tells us that it is not some agency *outside* of Jesus which is driving him. It is the very Spirit of God.

Remember that Mark himself is being urged by that same Spirit to tell this story. He might have digressed into a long theological reflection of the freedom of the will and whether Jesus was an active or passive participant in this event. But Mark isn't interested in these fine points of theology. He is not interested in the interior life of Jesus. Let the other evangelists give us a glimpse of his humanity, For Mark, Jesus is more of an event than a personality. For Mark, Jesus is literally *an act of God* forcefully entering human history.

Nevertheless even in Mark's gospel, Jesus is not an automaton. He is a real human being responding to the grand symphony of the grand and awesome life of God. Yet his response is not that which comes from outside like the order of a drill sergeant. It is the inner response of one who is perfectly attuned to the harmonic frequency of the Creator.

What a difference there is between being exposed to the sound of a musical composition and allowing it to touch the depths of our lives. There is a difference between attending a concert and being in the midst of sound and entering into the music intentionally and mindfully. Just as there is a difference between attending a worship service without allowing for the possibility that God has arranged this time and place as a meeting ground to encounter and become part of his vast complex yet beautifully simple song of love.

To open ourselves to this meeting even a little bit is to feel the urgent energy to go where the music leads us.

Having said this I have to remind myself and perhaps, you that it is very difficult for us to open our lives to this great song of mercy, love and grace apart from Jesus. There are other religions which bring their faithful joy and peace. Yet I am a Christian. Jesus is for me the way, the truth and the life. I do not come to God apart from Jesus and I don't recommend you trying it. It is Jesus Christ who in the words of the great hymn tunes my heart to sing (God's) praise. My interior life is often a cacophony of conflicting notes. In Jesus they become come together. Apart from Jesus my life often feels isolated from the great heavenly chorale. In him I experience the joy and peace of being a part of something beyond my understanding and my tiny party is more than enough. Amen.