

A Real Head Turner  
Mark 1:4-11

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

My sermon today begins with an interaction exercise. That means we are going to interact. I will ask you to do something and then you will try to do it, that's how interaction works. Okay are you ready, are you comfortable, are you ready to interact? Good! I want everyone to look to their left, go ahead it won't hurt. Now slowly turn your heads to the right. Good. Try it again, hold your heads up and look to the left and slowly turn to the right. Wonderful! We are interacting. Now try this one everyone look down and slowly look up and then back down. Great! I think your all getting this interaction thing down now. You interact well!

Now that your all warmed up, and your neck muscles are all loose and your head is able to move from side to side and up and down, we are ready to begin this sermon. I needed to loosen you all up this morning because this Gospel reading is a real head snapper. It is one of those times when you are looking one way and something captures your attention and your head snaps around to see it. You may be reading the newspaper or reading a book, but you hear something shocking on the TV that the kids are listening to and your head snaps up to see what they are watching. Or you're driving down the road concentrating on the car in front of you when suddenly you see a flash of orange and blue running between the cars parked on the side of the road, and your head snaps over to see what it could be. Advertisers are famous for using this technique to capture attention, why do you think they have those drop dead gorgourous models – male and female in the commercials that have nothing to do with the product they are selling, it is to get your attention, to make your head turn and look.

Today we get the hand snapping story of the Baptism of Jesus, so I had to warm you up before you pulled a muscle snapping your head around. You see this entire story is head snapping, from John to Jesus, from the river to the heavens, from Jesus to the Father to the Spirit. The movement is fast and if your not careful you could hurt a neck muscle trying to watch the entire story unfold before you.

Mary doesn't start like the Gospels of Matthew or Luke, there is no story of Christmas, no nativity, no stars, no shepherds or wise magi. Mark's Gospel begins with John the prophet of the Lord who comes out in the wilderness, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And that is right where our Gospel starts today, John is in the wilderness preaching and baptizing. Preaching and Baptism is nothing new, others have done it, John was doing it before Jesus came and commanded that his disciples do this very thing. Except John's baptism was understood differently than being baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. What John was doing was preaching like the prophets of old.

He was preaching to the people of Judea and Jerusalem and everyone who would listen that the people of Israel needed to prepare for the Lord's coming, that they needed to repent of their sins and turn back to God. Over and over Israel had broken the covenant that God had made with Abraham. And over and over again, God had to send a prophet to remind the people to repent, to turn back and listen to the voice of the Lord. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Hosea, and so many others had come before John preaching a time of repentance. John was calling all the people to wash away their old self, their sinful self and turn towards God in a new commitment. And all eyes were upon him.

The text tells us that the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Now of course we don't literally take that to mean every last person, but it clearly means he was the talk of the countryside and even in the city. The people were buzzing with the news of this man named John. Every one was looking his way and concentrating on who he might be.

Then snap with the ninth verse, all heads snap around to see Jesus. Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. I am sure John knew who Jesus was. He knew Jesus from birth and even before that according to Luke's Gospel reading. John knew Jesus as his cousin and he knew him as the coming Messiah, even leaping in his mother, Elizabeth's womb as Mary approached to share with her the news of Gabriel. Now thirty or so years later, John knew Jesus as he came to the river that day. All heads probably turn from that wild, camel coat wearing, bug eating, honey drinking, loud prophet of the wilderness to Jesus. In fact according to the Gospel of John, when Jesus comes to the river, John points and

proclaims that he is the Lamb of God. Look this is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. And all heads turn from John to the coming Messiah, to Christ, the Son of God, the Lamb who takes away the Sin of the world.

And then as soon as Jesus is baptized all heads snap up from looking at this one who the prophet has declared as the anointed one, to the heavens, because the heavens are torn open. This word in the Greek doesn't refer to a nice break in the clouds and the sun peeks through. No this word in the Greek is a violent ripping, a tearing a shredding of the sky. It is the same word used when the temple curtain, the covering that is thirty feet high and up to six inches thick is suddenly ripped in two from top to bottom when Jesus breathes his last, and the holy of holies is revealed for the first time to all who can see. This ripping is a sudden and very visible sign of the power of God. This is a head snapping moment, when heads have turned from John to Jesus from Jesus in the river to the sky.

But that's not all, as the heads are all snapped up looking to the sky, the spirit comes down, floating down like a dove. This Spirit of the Lord descends upon Jesus and covers him. So just in case anybody didn't believe what John had said about Jesus being the chosen one of God's anointing, the spirit comes through the ripped open sky and makes it a clear sign that the Lord's anointed is here.

So every head that snapped up from the river to the ripping of the sky now snaps back down to Jesus and as quick as that they snap back up because a voice from heaven declares, "You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased.

What a declaration, every head there would have known right away that the voice was spoken from God. Jesus was the Messiah, the chosen one of God, Jesus Christ. And I am sure the heads would have snapped up to heaven at the hearing of that message but they would have all come back down upon Jesus wondering what kind of Son of God this will be. All that head snapping, from John to Jesus, from Jesus to God. From the God to the Spirit back down to Jesus as he is about to begin his ministry. Within the next couple of verses Jesus picks his disciples and begins his ministry. From this moment on all eyes, all heads, and ears are hands, and feet follow Jesus. All that head snapping, ends up with everyone looking to Jesus, the Son of God.

This begins it all according to Mark. Baptism is a head turning event. Jesus didn't need to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, because he was sinless. He

didn't need to be baptized to be claimed by God as his child, because Jesus is God, fully man and fully God. He didn't need to be baptized to be assured of his presence in the kingdom of God, because he was, and is, and always shall be the King of kings, and Lord of lords. He was baptized so that all eyes, all heads, all people would know it has begun, the time is at hand, the kingdom of God has begun and is being fulfilled even now.

We come to the waters of baptism, we turn our eyes to the water, we feel it with our hands and hear it with our ears, and we know that in this water and with God's word we are made part of the kingdom that is eternal. It is not a once and over event. It is a beginning, that offers us a cleansing of our sins and claiming that we are a child of God, that begins a life time of discipleship. It is an event that should turn our head each and every time we see this font and remember the blessings and the gifts we receive in this water. It should turn our heads away from the world of sin, of darkness and evil and instead towards God, the light of light and hope everlasting. The promise made in this baptism is a true head turner because it is a true life turner. It changes you forever, from one under death, to a child of God forever, forgiven, washed clean, and given a place in that eternal kingdom. Come and celebrate that great gift this day, remember your baptism and remember your life has been turned, changed, created a new now and forever. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. AMEN.

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Almighty God, you have sent Jesus Christ to overcome all hardships and all temptations, even satan and death itself. He overcame all these things to win for us a place in your eternal kingdom. Continue to bless us with that hope and assurance, so that all stumbling blocks may be removed from our journey of faith. Send your spirit of knowledge and guidance to taken away all worries and temptations so that your creation may do as you will.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer..

O Heavenly Father, we ask that you bless us with the mind of Christ so that we may be his partners in welcoming others into your lift of grace and forgiveness. In a world of violence and war, we need your blessing of peace. In a world filled with hatred and envy and guilt, we need your forgiveness. In a world filled with disasters both manmade and natural where so many are suffering we need you to tend to us and keep us. Lord Bless us this day with your Love, grace, forgiveness and peace.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer.

God, stretch out your saving hand to those who are sick. With your strong love, comfort the lonely, the oppressed, and all who suffer. Give courage to those facing surgery. Give healing to those who are afflicted. Give peace to those troubled both physically and mentally. Impart your Holy Comforter to be with them in their times of need. Especially we remember today our hospitalized, our homebound and all those we name now in our prayers to you....

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for this community of faithful; teach us to use the many gifts you have given us for the common mission of your Church. Take and use us as your witnesses, as your servants in this community and beyond to spread your word, to share your good news, to welcome the stranger and lift up those torn down by hatred and sin. Lift up your face and shine upon us and send us forth as your witnesses of that glory now and forever.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Into your hands, o Lord we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.