

**Second Sunday Christmas/Narrative Year 2**  
**January 5, 2020**  
**Mark 1:1-20 (21-45)**  
**Resolutions Sermon Series 1: Food/Diet**  
**“Food for Thought”**

**Introduction:**

As we embark upon a new year together, we are going to work our way through the gospel of Mark and will be using selections from the Narrative Lectionary. Mark’s telling of the story of Jesus is action-packed, is appealing to the imagination, and is the shortest of the synoptic gospels. This adventure will be an exciting one, and you are invited to join us. We will also have as a supplemental resource: N.T. Wright’s *Mark for Everyone*. The gospels get written four to seven decades after Jesus, and Mark is the oldest (60-70s AD/CE). Listen to today’s lesson:

**Mark 1:1-20**

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,

who will prepare your way;

the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight,’”

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;

repent, and believe in the good news.” As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

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How many of you make New Year’s resolutions? One person says a resolution is something that goes in one year and out the other! I have a friend who resolves to read more this year, so he turned on subtitles on his television! Each New Year, according to many studies, 7 out of 10 Americans go on a diet as their number one goal for the year. We want to get fit, lose weight, and become better versions of our selves. I have lost count of all the times I have told myself around Thanksgiving: “Just make it through the holidays, Wain, eat your fill, enjoy, feast and celebrate then on January 1<sup>st</sup>, you can tighten up, buckle down, and lose the holiday pounds.”

Have you done this? Our faith invites us, yes, to take care of ourselves and to treat our bodies as the glorious temples that they are; however, our faith calls us to be wise and aware of fads. Fads always fade, and we are left with the choice whether or not we will learn to love ourselves for who we are as God’s children. Just the other day, Heather, one of the instructors at the Y, said at the beginning of a Body Flow class, “Let’s learn to love, respect, and appreciate our bodies as they are.” Food for thought for 2020.

Sandra Aamondt is a neuroscientist who gave a fascinating TED talk in 2013 about her own personal struggle with dieting and how her research led her to stop and embrace a more mindful approach. She says,

“Your brain has its own sense of what you should weigh, no matter what you consciously believe. This is called your set point, but that's a misleading term, because it's actually a range of about 10 or 15 pounds. You can use lifestyle choices to move your weight up and down within that range, but it's much, much harder to stay outside of it. The hypothalamus, the part of the brain that regulates body weight, releases more than a dozen chemical signals in the brain that tell your

body to gain weight, more than another dozen that tell your body to lose it, and the system works like a thermostat, responding to signals from the body by adjusting hunger, activity and metabolism, to keep your weight stable as conditions change. That's what a thermostat does, right? It keeps the temperature in your house the same as the weather changes outside. Now you can try to change the temperature in your house by opening a window in the winter, but that's not going to change the setting on the thermostat, which will respond by kicking on the furnace to warm the place back up. Your brain works exactly the same way, responding to weight loss by using powerful tools to push your body back to what it considers normal, which is why fad diets do not work.” (Source: [https://www.ted.com/talks/sandra\\_aamodt\\_why\\_dieting\\_doesn\\_t\\_usually\\_work/transcript?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/sandra_aamodt_why_dieting_doesn_t_usually_work/transcript?language=en))

Hold on to that bit of science, especially as we think about the character of John the Baptizer. He is a person who seems to know himself well. He does not strike me as one who rides the bandwagon or who is easily swayed by his peers to be pressured to do something he doesn't feel is right. John seems to practice an ancient form of mindfulness which is, simply defined, “the quality or state of being conscious or aware of something.”

John is conscience and aware of his role as God's messenger. He is a man of the wilderness, faithful to God and suspicious of the power brokers in the temple. His lifestyle reflects intentional, mindful commitments to God to set a good example for others to follow. John is not a man of the latest dietary fad or religious trend.

John is a wilderness man who eats locusts and wild honey and likely other simple things. He dresses simply and challenges all who will listen to take a good look at themselves. He comes to splash cold water on all of us to make sure we don't miss the work of God right under our noses. He is not the Messiah. Jesus is the One who is, and he will soon be here. John prepares the way. John gets us ready to welcome the call of Jesus to be faithful, obedient disciples. Many people prayed to God before John shows up to come and rescue them, come and send someone to defend their cause, whip up on the Romans, and make all things right. The last thing they expect is for someone to demand that they must repent and get wet.

This year, right now, I challenge us to take John at his word—repent, humble ourselves before God and work to let go of unrealistic notions about cultural fads and getting serious about who and whose we are as mindful disciples of Jesus Christ.

Sandra Aamondt says this about mindfulness. See if it speaks to you:

“If I've convinced you that dieting might be a problem, the next question is, what do you do about it? And my answer, in a word, is mindfulness. I'm not saying you need to learn to meditate or take up yoga. I'm talking about mindful eating: learning to understand your body's signals so that you eat when you're hungry and stop when you're full, because a lot of weight gain boils down to eating when you're not hungry. How do you do it? Give yourself permission to eat as much as you want, and then work on figuring out what makes your body feel good. Sit down to regular meals without distractions. Think about how your body feels when you start to eat and when you stop, and let your hunger decide when you should be done. It took about a year for me to learn this, but it's really been worth it. I am so much more relaxed around food than I have ever been in my life. I often don't think about it. I forget we have chocolate in the house” (Source: *Ibid*).

John comes before Jesus, and Jesus is baptized by John. Then Jesus goes into the wilderness for 40 days to be tempted. Mark's gospel is unique because he doesn't tell us how Jesus is tempted. In other accounts, the very first temptation for Jesus is that relating to hunger--to turn the stones into bread. Remember what Jesus says? “A person doesn't live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). That's mindfulness.

I hope that are at least two important take-aways for us today, food for thought as we dream of the year ahead and resolve to do some good things. The first is what I call “the diet of the Word.” I pray that all of us will commit ourselves to a wholesome diet that of course will be good to our bodies physically, eating real foods, focusing on things that we can pronounce, and enjoying the people with whom we share our meals.

I also want us to feed our faith daily by studying God's Word. The written Word reveals to us stories of the Word-made-flesh in Jesus. It is sacred and unique and holy. God's Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light to our path. The more we learn and know of God's goodness through God's Word, the more we grow as the people of God. I encourage all of us to spend time daily in God's good Word and to expect God to meet us there and to engage us deeply. Read the gospel of Mark with us.

After the saga of the wilderness where Jesus successfully endures temptation, Jesus calls fishermen to follow him. “Come and I'll help you fish for people” is what he tells them.

I love this image. Think about the sequence: we have John, then baptism, then testing, and then action. In addition to the diet of the Word, we get the gift of the diet of Works. God feeds us and sends us out to serve. God gives us a message to share: Jesus Christ loves and cares for the entire creation. Put down your nets, drop what you are doing, and go reach people with the message of Jesus Christ!

Food for thought this year: we are pretty good at doing things for ourselves—cutting some calories, exercising, and making space for things such as reading or music. One friend of mine hopes to do less laundry this year and to achieve that goal by wearing more deodorant!

Growth comes as God's people when we share the faith by doing good things for other people. This is outreach, mission, serving, and helping others who are hungry to find where the good bread is and taste the sweet

Just the other day, I got to talk with Tiffany, the former youth director at St. Peter's who now lives in Dallas, Texas. I asked her about what she is enjoying doing outside of church. Guess what she said? There's a counseling program for underprivileged youth in Dallas, and they needed someone to come and sit with the teenagers during long periods of waiting before they go in, someone just to care about them, talk to them, listen, and show interest in them. Tiffany is perfect for this way of serving, and the teenagers whose lives are in chaos need people like her. Someone needs you to serve them. Who is that for you? Where is God calling you to be more mindful about mission?

Let's enjoy and savor the good food God gives us this year, especially things like sweet local honey and fresh shrimp. I think John the Baptizer would have eaten more shrimp and less bugs had he lived here! Let's be mindful about what goes in our mouths and as well mindful about the bread of God's word and mindful of the bread of loving our neighbors, especially spending a little time with people who can do nothing for us in return. Food for thought for 2020.

To God be the glory. Amen.