Close encounters

Mark 1:4-11

This passage is the first appearance of Jesus as an adult and comes at the beginning of his ministry. Some people thought John might be the promised Messiah, but John makes it clear that the Messiah is still to come and will baptize with the Holy Spirit. When Jesus is baptized, the Holy Spirit comes on him, and God's voice names him as beloved – a true sign of who Jesus is.

Read this week's passage:



PLAY

In the bath or a tub, play out the story of Jesus' baptism using a doll or toy figures. Lower the toy figure, pour water, use hands to make a dove that floats down afterwards. What thoughts or feelings do you have as you do this?

MAKE

Make a handprint Holy Spirit dove and pray for the working of the Spirit in your life.

Discuss

Talk to two or three other Christians this week and discuss what you do to help you encounter God in your everyday lives.

Living Scripture

'John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.' **Mark 1:4**

It is significant that Jesus' baptism took place in the desert, because there are many important encounters with God that take place in the wilderness: Abraham and Sarah meet three strangers who promise them a longed-for child; Jacob wrestles with a mysterious stranger; Moses sees the burning bush and all the Israelites see God leading them through the desert. In the Old Testament, the wilderness is not an empty space, it is filled with the presence of God.

Can the same be said for our lives? Sometimes we have to withdraw to make room for God, seeking out quiet and putting distance between ourselves and our day-to-day business. God does not shout over the noise surrounding us or force his way into our lives; rather God has to be invited in, just as Jesus encourages us to 'knock' at the door of the kingdom of heaven.

What steps do you need to take to invite God into your life? Are there times when your 'wilderness' has felt more 'empty' than 'full'? What needs or experiences do you want to bring before God today?

First impressions

- How might this image represent what we read about Jesus in today's passage?
- How do we encounter God in our lives?
- In what ways do encounters with God change us and help us in our mission?



Pray

God, we give thanks for encounters with you,
aware of your presencetransforming our whole being.
Still us, that we may hear your words of affirmation
once more:
'You are my child, the Beloved,
with you I am well pleased.'
Amen.

Research

John's diet might not be your ideal Sunday lunch! Research why scientists are saying we should eat more insects. Would you do it to reduce carbon emissions? You could start with this feature from BBC Newsround.

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