

Jan 8,12 Mark 1:1-8

WELCOME TO REALITY

Reality shows seem to be the thing these days. You have all kinds of them. Check the TV cable networks and you can find just about anything you want in a reality series from cooking wars to driving on the ice trails in Alaska to following the lives of the Kardashians or the housewives of wherever, or the octomom, or Kate and whoever, and there are many more. Then you have the bachelor, then the bachelorette shows. How would you have liked to be the crying woman on the promo that must have been rejected and people see you night after night crying and the show has just begun.

Welcome to the real world, folks. A world full of disappointments, sadness's, joys, unhappiness, crisis's and who knows what. The real world is filled with all kinds of pains, problems and whatever. Think about the chaos of the world these days. So much unrest and unruliness. With TV we have seen countries seemingly in rebellion against their leaders. Their rebellion is not without violence. Even our own country is seeing some of this with some unruly groups. Now there is fear Iran will be having a nuclear bomb sometime. I was a young boy when WW II ended and we were told to build bomb shelters and stock up on food just in case of a nuclear attack. Is that going to be brought back? It's a scary world out there. Protestors seem to come out of the woodwork and the next thing you know, an uprising. Isn't that what happened in our land when we had a Civil War that cost this nation so many losses in lives, divided families, and of course divided this country? It led to the first assassination of a president when Booth killed President Lincoln. Chaos ruled. Instead of a healed nation following the end of the war, there were those who wanted to perpetuate the unrest. Booth was one of them. And you know, in many ways our nation is still divided. In the south I'd still be referred to as a 'Yankee' or

even a ‘dam Yankee’ because I was born in the Northeast, in the Boston area. You can’t get more Yankee than that.

Welcome to the real world. We don’t always get what we want. We live in a free country and we are proud of it. It has been said many times if you don’t like it, leave it, go someplace else. But we all know we aren’t perfect but we do have freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of elections.

Welcome to the real world, the world that Jesus was born into over 2,000 years ago. Mark’s gospel begins this way. *“The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in Isaiah the prophet; ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way—a voice of one calling in the desert; ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”*

Welcome to the real world John the Baptist, a world full of hatred and turmoil. Welcome to the world of the ‘brood of vipers’ as John calls them. Welcome to the real world Jesus, a world full of disarray, hatred, social strife, disappointments, sorrow and rebellion. Welcome to the real world Jesus, a world that is out of control where people seem to do their own thing and think nothing of it. Welcome to the real world Jesus, a world where you can believe almost anything you want.

Wasn’t that just about what it was like back then? Think about it. The Jewish nation had been in exile and finally returned yet the world wasn’t a Godly place. For over 400 years God’s voice seemed to be quiet. No major prophets speaking. The church is silent. Rome was now in charge of things and Nero was king and Rome ruled the world. There were many gods being worshipped. Pick your own....or pick none! You were free to do what you wanted within reason as long as you paid tribute to Rome. Don’t mess with him. Don’t mess with his troops or you will pay the price. Even the Jewish people struggled because the priests and others had lost their true focus and understanding of God’s plan for his people. God was

not pleased with those who were called by his name. From God's original order of things have come corruption of the priesthood and religious leaders.

Into this Jesus is born. He came to bring love and change of heart and teach that all are welcome into God's kingdom. Trust in him, trust in his Father he proclaimed. We celebrated the fact that in a world filled with darkness came a great Light. That Light of the world revealed to mankind their sinfulness whether they liked it or not.

Welcome to reality Joseph and Mary. Not everyone was as happy as you and the shepherds and the wise men were when your baby was born. Not everyone was ready to bring gifts honoring him as their king. Welcome to reality Anna and Simeon. When this baby of Mary and Joseph was presented in the Temple not everyone sees him or welcomes him as the Messiah. You know what fate awaits this child as you try and warn Mary. A cross is in his future...a cross of suffering, shame and rejection. Not everyone was as fortunate to understand God sent his son to free the world of their sins. He came as king, but not of this kingdom. He came as king to rule all the nations and one day he will. Welcome to reality Mary. For one day your heart will be broken for this son of yours will pay the price of rejection by his own people, betrayed by one of his own for thirty pieces of silver and denied by one who one day would lead the church. Welcome to the real world where hearts aren't always turned toward God for they always have a choice.

And as we see this morning a voice comes into this hectic world. A voice that cries out, "Prepare the way of the Lord. Make a straight path for him." And out of the wilderness comes a weird looking man carrying his rod, dressed in camel's hair, a man with a long beard, straggly hair and a leather belt around his waist and whose diet is locust and honey. Not your typical preacher or prophet, but his words are stinging and true.

Into the real world of that time where there seemed to be little hope came a voice preparing the people to be ready to receive the one who was to come whose sandals straps he wasn't worthy to tie. It wasn't his looks that disturb the people it was his message. *"Repent! After me will come one more powerful than I..... I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."* Luke's gospel goes a little further when it states John the Baptist's message... *"You children of snakes! Who warned you to escape the judgment that is coming soon? Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives....., every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be chopped down and tossed into the fire."* Luke states, *"With many other words John appealed to them."*

Welcome to the real world. I hope we never ever forget why God sent us his son. I hope we never ever forget the greatest gift that was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. I hope we never forget the cost of our salvation when they nailed Jesus to the cross and he gave his life for the forgiveness of the worlds sins.

Welcome to the real world people. God has told us we are in this world but our eventual goal is a place in paradise with Jesus and others who believe in him. We might have to put up with some of the things of this world, but we don't have to do as the world does, nor believe as the world does. Where there is hatred we can sow seeds of love. Where there is unrest we can try and reach out in peace. Where there is no hope we can offer hope through our Savior and Lord. There are two roads to travel the wide one that leads to destruction whose road was blazed by Satan...or the narrow road that leads to eternal life with God that was prepared by Jesus Christ.

It's tough going out there beyond these four walls to live a Christian life. There are people in this world that don't like our country and want to hurt us. 911

proved that and so did those world wars. There are some out there who don't like us because of our race or nationality or the way we talk. There are some who are out there who don't like us because of what we stand for and what we believe. Just look at how much fuss has been made of the quarterback Tebow from Denver. They focus on him kneeling to pray just before he takes the field. Is that something to be ashamed of? When he gives thanks to God for helping him secure a victory that day the papers and others mock him. In some ways I can relate to him. When I was in the "working world" the guys I worked with poked fun at me because I didn't speak as they did anymore and my conversations weren't like theirs. They knew me when I behaved like them and it was hard for them to accept the change they saw even though I never felt I did that many bad things. They bowed before me and wanted to kiss my ring like I was the pope. They made a communion cup out of a plastic wine cup and said I was called of God. They put a cross and sign on my work cart saying something like "Father Dick will hold confessions later." They made a number list that put a number instead of a cuss word so that they would not offend me. Throughout the plant you could hear numbers being yelled instead of the actual words. One foreman would bring a new employee to my department to introduce them to me and say, "This is Dick Piscatelli, he used to be a dirty old man." At first I was horrified by what he said, but then I realized, hey, he saw the change that had happened in my life, so that was a good thing. It was also a God thing.

Welcome to the real world church. Our Savior came that we might not be able to live in the real world but be his witnesses and share his story. He came to give us strength, courage and hope to survive the onslaught of Satan's army. We are the church together who are called to be witnesses to the world that our Savior has been

born and that those who believe in him are to share his love and his forgiveness with the whole world. We, God's people have been commissioned a

long time ago to go into the world to bring the Good News about Jesus Christ in order for others to find joy, peace, forgiveness and eternal life. That's the real mission of the church. We are trying to make a difference in our little corner of the world that God has given to us. 'This little light of mine' we should sing, 'I'm going to let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.' Whether it is in our neighborhood, or where we work or where we travel as followers of Christ we are his witnesses and people watch us, listen to our conversations, see how we act or react. We are trying to help the young families and teens and younger ones that the Christian faith does matter. They face lots of obstacles to their faith today and will tomorrow and the next. So we need to prepare them for that journey. We need families to be ready to meet the darts of the enemy.

Welcome to the real world. Jesus came to transform a world that was full of evil. Many times Jesus looked at the crowds with tears in his eyes because they walked around with no joy in their lives. Some struggled like the real world we know today for they were oppressed, maybe had no jobs, very little to eat. When he saw them he had compassion on them and said they looked like "sheep without a shepherd." They just didn't know where to turn. His message always was to heal them of whatever hurt they had and for them to turn to God, trust in him. John came preaching to get your paths straight for the one who could transform your life was on his way and he was ready to turn the world upside down so that the world would once more find true peace and joy.

Welcome to the real world today, a world almost like Jesus came into. But we need to remember... because he came to us and lives among us we can be that beacon on the hill for others. Welcome to God's world, a world where we walk in faith and trust and love. Welcome to a world where Jesus is king and we worship his name. Welcome to the world where a brighter future awaits those who trust in the one who was born in a stable but grew to die on a cross to give us life eternal. Welcome to the real world where others will try to lead you astray but a world

where those who stay faithful will receive their rewards. Welcome to the real world of joy through Jesus Christ.

It's a jungle out there. But we have the jungle tamer with us always. His name is Jesus. So don't be afraid. Heed the call of the angels, the voice of Jesus throughout his ministry to 'fear not' for I am with you. Welcome to the world of reality where sin lies just outside these doors. But hear the Good News. One has come to help us deal with the reality of a sinful world. He came to set us free...to free us from sin...to offer us a new life. To offer us himself.

John the Baptist came to announce that one was about to enter center stage who would transform the world and all who would believe in him would be free. His name was Jesus. Do YOU know my boss?