

Sunday, January 28, 2018

Rev. Robert W. Brown

SERMON



Mark 1:14-20

INTRODUCTION:

For the next 5 weeks we will be focusing on The Gospel of Mark. This Gospel is distinctive in many ways, for one, it focuses more on what Jesus did rather than what he said. Second, the events fly by with minimal exposition. Someone once said that Mark begins like an alarm clock, persistently declaring the time and demanding some kind of response. Time and urgency seems to be an overarching theme in the literary style that is certainly reflected in Jesus' language and behavior throughout the narrative.

Jesus has been baptized, spent 40 days alone in the dessert and comes away ready to begin his ministry by gathering his disciples.

Hear this reading from the Gospel of Mark Chapter 1 verses 14 through 20.



SCRIPTURE:

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.



In the scripture we just heard, Jesus preaches his first sermon and it is the perfect elevator speech to sum up all meaning and purpose for the entire world for all time - it is so succinct it could be tweeted; "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." Then, he sees Simon and Andrew casting a net into the sea and calls them to follow him. He then sees James and John, mending nets in their boats with their father Zebedee, and calls them to follow. They leave their nets and their father behind and follow Jesus. What was it about Jesus that made them ready to drop what they were doing and immediately follow him? Was it what he said, or how he said it? Maybe they were just young men bored with stinky nets and slimy fish, itching for something new to come along, and Jesus was that something new?

I think there's major clue imbedded in this scripture of what happened in the hearts and minds of these first disciples; something major compelled them to make such a dramatic decision. And I believe it can compel us as well. Let us pray.

*Holy God thank you for your Word, so full of promise and hope.
Open our spirits this morning to follow you even more closely and
understand more deeply. May the words of my mouth and the
meditation of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you our
rock and our redeemer. - Amen.*

There are many ways to study scripture. One is simply take in the story like you would any novel or drama and imagine being in the scene. As a former filmmaker, I take this to extreme. I imagine the weather; I imagine what was happening to each of the characters just before we come into the scene. I play around with the tone of the dialogue. For instance, maybe it's early morning along the sea of Galilee; daylight is just breaking through the fog, and a misty rain falls. Was Jesus standing on the street corner yelling at people as they went to work? "***The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.***" Not likely. So what else? We know a few things about this first century culture that is useful here. The Jewish people were oppressed captives in their own land. Living under the heavy boot of Roman occupation was brutal, exploitive, and humiliating. Yet the prophetic Hebrew Scriptures were thick with Messianic overtones and it is easy to imagine that there were many conversations about the promised Messiah. In fact the prophet Jeremiah wrote, "The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will restore (my people) to the land I gave their ancestors. I

will send for many fishermen...and they will catch them.”¹ So messianic expectation and talk of prophetic fulfillment was likely a common conversation in the synagogues, around the villages, and in casual gathering places. Talking about the coming liberation through a Messiah is what gave them hope. It’s what keeps you going. In this setting it’s easy to imagine Jesus proclaiming this good news among other Jews and even easier to imagine the hearers receiving these words with great gladness and heightened urgency.

So let’s look at the words carefully. *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."* First, “the time is fulfilled”. Did you know there are two different types of time in the New Testament Greek? Chronos time is what we normally live in. It’s regular time, it’s one minute at a time, it’s counting the days until your beloved child returns safely home from a semester abroad, it’s ten frustratingly long minutes caught in the Cumberland Farms gas station line that will not move, it’s five l o n g minutes in the examining room, waiting for the doctor to return with the results, it’s two weeks until the Super Bowl kickoff time. It’s the clock ticking as you finish your sermon. Chronos is the hard, slow passing time we all live in.

Then there’s kairos time. Kairos is God’s time. It’s time outside of time. It’s metaphysical time. Kairos are those magical moments in which time itself seems to stand still. Some mystics call it “the eternal now”, a time full and thick with divine perfection and somehow you get it. Like when you hold your newborn for the first time or a sudden moment when you truly see the beauty of your spouse just normally doing some regular thing. It’s when you’re sitting silently on the beach at sunset and realize how perfect everything is and that somehow you are part of this perfection. Jesus said, “The kairos is fulfilled.”

Not only that but in this perfect, fulfilled kairos, the kingdom of God has come near.” Many Christians today believe that we live this life only in chronos, day-by-day, year-by-year until that one day we will die and rise again into the eternal bliss of kairos. But Jesus says no, the kingdom of God is near. It’s right now! And here is how to live it. “Repent, and believe in the good news.”

Repent simply means to turn in a new direction because the direction your going in is the wrong way. Like when your GPS recalculates that wrong turn

¹ Jer 16:14-16

you just made and suggests you turn in a new direction.

And finally, “believe the good news”. To believe is not simply a thin hope for a better day. Historian Karen Armstrong notes that for most of human history belief was synonymous not with theological doctrine but rather with **behaving** differently. You don’t decide to have faith in God as much as you first **act Godly**. You commit to a Godly way of being and then you begin to understand the nature of God and the value of religion. Belief is behavior that leads to understanding.

When you unpack this tweetable elevator sermon you can see it is rich with very good news. And I can easily imagine this memorable sermon made it’s way quickly around the lively fishing village along the Sea of Galilee even without social media. So when Jesus sees Simon and his brother Andrew and then Zebedee’s boys, James and John, they likely had heard this good news and here standing before them was the author saying to them, “follow me and I will make you fish for people.” Jesus is saying come follow me to liberate humanity! Given all this, was there really any choice what so ever.

Jesus is inviting us all to follow him, to believe in a committed way that guides our behavior. When we follow in the Way of Jesus we begin to be aware of kairos moments all around us in the here and now. The gas station line loses its frustration; the exam room opens into an opportunity for gratitude and an abiding knowledge that no matter what, you are not alone.

People of God, this is the good news of the Gospel. The time is fulfilled; it’s here in this eternal now. The kingdom of God has come near. Let us lean into a new direction and act out a faith that invites us to believe in the good news and truly follow in the Way of Jesus. AMEN.