

Mark 1:14-20

Epiphany 3B + January 21, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
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The Preacher

The Word of the Lord from Mark 1:14-15: "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel.'" This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

After a brief detour into the gospel of John last week, we're back in Mark 1 this Sunday, only 14 verses into the book. The story of Jesus' public ministry is about to begin: so far, Jesus been baptized by John. Then, He's disappeared for forty days, to be tempted by Satan in the wilderness.

Now this mystery Man is back. Now He begins His public ministry; and whatever He does next will set the stage for all that is to come. So as Jesus emerges from the wilderness, the one called God's beloved Son from heaven, you can imagine all eyes on Him to see what He's going to do.

And what does He do? He preaches. Wherever Jesus goes, He's all about sermons.

And what does He preach? His entire message is summed up with the words, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel."

If you were hoping that Jesus would kick off His ministry with a rock-concert of miracles to heal everybody, cast out demons and right various wrongs, then it might be a little disappointing that He sets the stage for all that He does by preaching. In fact, you may worry that this will only motivate pastors in our current day to keep harping on repentance and get long-winded in their sermons. Maybe even longer-winded. Horrors.

But let's tease this out a bit. Whenever Jesus preaches, He is speaking the Word of God because He *is* God in the flesh. He can't not speak God's Word. God's Word is powerful stuff: by it, God created all things in the beginning; and throughout His ministry, Jesus will speak His Word to do all sorts of miracles, like healing the sick, raising the dead, stilling storms and casting out demons. His Word is powerful stuff. So whenever Jesus is preaching, He is speaking His Word as powerfully as ever – He's working miracles like healing souls, cleansing consciences and raising the dead to eternal life. You can't see it, but it's still powerful, miraculous work.

So if *all* Jesus ever does is preach on the way to the cross, you should be dancing with joy. (Just not right now.)

And what does Jesus preach? He starts out with, "The time is fulfilled." The time is fulfilled! People have been waiting since nearly the beginning of creation for the Messiah to arrive and cement their salvation. It's been a long wait, thousands of years. Over a time like that, it's easy to lose hope. In fact, it's a miracle that anyone is still hoping for the Messiah when Jesus appears. But appear He does. God has kept His promises. The Christ has come. The time is fulfilled.

Next, says Jesus, "the kingdom of God is at hand." The kingdom of God is at hand because the King is at hand. The Son of God, born of Mary, is the Lord of heaven and earth. Wherever He is, He is giving out the gifts of the kingdom – forgiveness, healing, life and salvation. Note that Jesus doesn't say, "Because I have come *now*, the kingdom of heaven will arrive *later*, and perhaps you can be its citizens *then*." He says that the kingdom of heaven has come. All who believe in Him are already citizens of

heaven, sons and daughters of the King, even now. It's not apparent yet to the eyes, any more than a king looks like a king if he's wearing tourist clothes in a foreign land. But Jesus is the King *now*, His kingdom comes with Him *now*, and all who believe in Him are part of His kingdom *now*.

The King goes on to preach, "Repent and believe the gospel."

Repent. Now, that sounds like a rather dull message. If you drive around town and check out churches where they try to keep posting witty messages, I'll bet that none of them start out with, "Repent." It sounds like such a downer to start with a reminder of the fact that we're poor, miserable sinners. But maybe that's because we get repentance wrong.

"Repent:" literally, "change your mind." Stop thinking one thing, and start thinking something else. Stop believing what is false, and start believing what is true. Stop believing the lies of the devil, world and your own sinful flesh; and start believing what the King has to say.

Repentance and faith are not just about forgiveness for your sins. They are about deliverance from all evil. Everything that Jesus does is about giving you repentance and salvation. When He heals the sick and raises the dead, He is preaching repentance: He is saying, "Stop believing that death is more powerful than God, and that your life ends in the grave. Start believing that I am more powerful than death, and that in Me you will live forever. In fact, start believing that, in Me, you *already* have eternal life."

When Jesus casts out demons, He is preaching repentance. He is saying, "Stop believing the devil's lies that he's in charge of this world and has a say in your destiny. Start believing that I'm far more powerful than the father of lies. Believe that I cast out your sins as easily as I send demons scurrying away, and that My kingdom is yours now and forevermore."

We should also add that when Jesus is preaching repentance, Jesus is preaching repentance. To the Pharisees and all who believe that salvation comes by keeping the rules, He says, "Stop believing that you can make up for your sins by your works, because it hasn't yet worked once in the history of the world; and start believing you're saved because I have come to live for you, die for you and rise for you."

To those who are quite happy with their sins, He preaches, "Stop believing that God has no wrath for sin – don't mistake His patience for indifference. Instead, start believing the truth that your sins are killing you eternally, but that I have grace for all who desire forgiveness."

To those who despair that they are beyond redemption, He preaches, "Stop believing that your sin is more powerful than My grace. Instead, start believing that I open the kingdom of heaven for you, and that I welcome you into My kingdom now."

To any Greek stoics passing through Galilee, He would preach, "Stop believing that life is hopeless and that you're just being swept along to the grave. Start believing that I have come in the flesh to redeem all people, both Jew and Gentile, and welcome them into My kingdom *now and forever*."

Do you see? Everything that Jesus does is about repentance. It's about saving you from sin and false beliefs, and welcoming you into His kingdom with His truth and grace. When He speaks, He is delivering people from all the noise, all the lies and all the garbage that make them think that God doesn't care or is even out to get them. When He speaks, He is calling them into His kingdom, giving out grace and life.

Of course, He could just speak from heaven to get this done. But He's there in the flesh – not just to be approachable, but to save. People may only come into His kingdom if their sins are taken away; and He has become flesh to take away their sins by dying in their place. In fact, at the climax of

His public ministry, Christ the King will be crowned with thorns, enthroned on a cross and mocked by all as king. But it is by that death that He atones for your sin. Because the King suffers that hell for you, you are welcome in the kingdom of heaven.

By the way, what does Jesus do next in the Gospel of Mark? He starts calling disciples. He starts training preachers; because long after He dies, rises and ascends into heaven, He wants preachers declaring to all who will hear, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel."

So, I say to you: the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. The Lord Jesus Christ has died on the cross to redeem you from your sin; and by His Word and His Sacraments, He is present here today. Where the King is, His kingdom is. The Lord Jesus Christ is present, here and now, with grace and life, to bring you into His kingdom.

Because that is true, I also say to you: repent and believe the gospel. Stop believing what is false, and start believing what is true. And life-giving. And chock-full of grace and salvation.

Repent. Stop believing that God doesn't care about what you do with your mind and your body, because your sins of thought, word and deed are killing you, as is your little notion that you can sin all you want as long as you check the box and get to church now and then. Start believing that Jesus became flesh to save you – body, mind and all – from sin, and to give you life forever.

Stop believing that little sins are okay. Start believing that any sin is enough to condemn you, and know that Jesus died in your place even for your little sins.

Stop believing that there is no end to your pain and your sorrow. Believe that even if they last as long as this world, you're already a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, where you'll live forever and your pain and sorrow will flee away.

Stop believing that your prayers do no good. Believe that, as a child of the King and a citizen of the kingdom now, God the Father delights to hear your prayers, and He will answer them as He sees fit.

Stop believing that everybody at church is carefree and happy except you, because that's the devil's lie to make you think you're in worse shape than everybody else. Everybody puts on a good face at church, and everybody has their fair share of worries and sins. Believe that Christ comes with forgiveness, strength and the promise that He works all things for your good.

Stop believing that death wins. Believe instead the good news that death lost at the cross, that Jesus proved it on Easter Sunday, and that He will raise you from the dead. For that matter, stop believing that death is a friend. It's an enemy of Jesus, and Jesus calls you His friend.

See how this goes? Preaching is about warning you to stop believing what condemns you, and rather believe in Jesus who saves you. If your preacher isn't preaching this, you need a new preacher. Even if he's preaching marvelous stuff with lots of Bible verses, but he's not preaching repentance and forgiveness, you need a new preacher because he's not doing what Jesus has called him to do. Good Lord, preserve us.

Repent. And believe the gospel.

Note that He says, "Believe." And by His bidding to repent and believe, He gives you repentance and faith. For now, you walk by faith, not by sight. But by His holy Word, you know that the kingdom of God is already yours.

It is already yours because the King, who died and rose for you, has gathered you in.

The Kingdom of God is yours, because you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen