

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Epiphany 3B
January 24, 2021
Mark 1:14-20

Repent and Believe

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14-15 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

When Jesus called to Simon and Andrew, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men," His Word was so compelling that "they immediately left their nets and followed Him." They were soon followed by James and John. Four fishermen recruited as second-career Apostles. So what was their training? How does Jesus make them fishers of men? By teaching them how to preach. And what were they to preach? The same message Jesus Himself preached, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." It's really very simple.

You see, that's the essential message of every truly Christian sermon. For at that very time, in that very place, the kingdom of God was there - right in front of them. Everything that had been leading up to that moment and preparing for that moment had now come to pass. All of Israel's history, all of human history, had reached the point God had in mind. This was the fullness of time; all the prophecies foretelling what the Lord would do had now reached the point of fulfillment. This is the moment the world had been waiting for. Indeed, this is the moment the Lord had been waiting for, and working toward. It is now here in the coming of the Christ.

And with the King of kings and Lord of lords in their midst, "the kingdom of God is at hand." This is God's gracious rule and reign among men. It is God's end-time kingdom of grace and blessing. Jesus is the king who ushers it in. That's why Jesus can say this kingdom is "at hand." It is right here among you. The kingdom arrives with the presence of Jesus. That's how it works.

Yet, the kingdom of God is not limited to that place or that time. For the Lord Jesus is every bit as present right here and right now. "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (Matt. 18:20). He is present, not in a spiritualistic or imaginary way, but rather by and in the means He appointed - the written and spoken Word, and the bread and the wine of the Holy Supper. This is how He is present with us today, and how He distributes His gifts of forgiveness, salvation, and Godly comfort.

And what difference does it make that the kingdom of God is near you, that Jesus is in our midst? My dear friends, it makes all the difference in the world. Indeed, it makes all the

difference in your life. For the nearness of the kingdom of God is the basis for what Jesus says next.

“Repent, and believe in the gospel.” This is the same message God’s prophets had proclaimed in the Old Testament. This is what Jonah reluctantly preached to the Ninevites. This is certainly the same message John proclaimed at the Jordan. And it’s what Jesus proclaimed as well.

“Repent.” Turn from your sins. Turn away from them in sorrow and contrition, mourning how you have messed things up. Change your mind, change your way of thinking, from the world’s way of thinking and from the selfish desires of your flesh, which is turned in on itself. Recognize how you have broken God’s commandments, how you have not loved God with your whole heart, how you have not loved your neighbor as yourself. That’s what sin is. That’s what being a sinner is. Own it. Confess it. Don’t rationalize it or excuse your sins. Don’t compare yourself to other people, focusing on how bad they are. No, look in the mirror. See how you have sinned – in thought, word, and deed, in what you have done wrong and in what you have failed to do right. Admit you’re a sinner, lost without God’s mercy and forgiveness, having no righteousness in yourself that would avail before God. Recognize your need and your powerlessness before God’s righteous throne of judgment. The wages of sin is death. All that – yes, all of that – is packed into this one word of Jesus, “Repent.” Do you hear Jesus speaking to you today?

Now also hear Jesus say, “Believe in the Gospel.” For the Gospel is the glad tidings of God’s undeserved favor toward sinners like you and me. This is something to rejoice over, that God does not have only words of judgment to speak to us, but that He also speaks words of salvation and grace, words of comfort and consolation.

But this gospel is not just some vague pronouncement of “Everything’s OK. God’s a nice guy. He won’t hold your bad stuff against you.” No it goes much deeper than that. The gospel of God’s grace and forgiveness comes to us absolutely free, and at the same time it came at great cost. For Jesus Christ is the heart and center of this gospel. His person, His work is the specific content of this good news. Who Jesus is and what he has done – this is what makes the gospel good news.

This man Jesus who is going about Galilee, preaching and teaching and healing – He is the very Son of God come in the flesh, come down to earth to bring salvation to lost sinners. True God and true man, He is our brother and our Savior. As our brother, He fulfills the law on our behalf, always doing the right thing, the way man was meant to do it. And Jesus is our substitute also in taking the punishment that the law requires for sinners. Even though He had no sins of His own, Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross. He shed His holy blood for our forgiveness and our cleansing. And because He is the holy Son of God doing these things, His sacrifice is sufficient for all of us, for all men everywhere. Christ’s righteousness is enough to cover the entire world. God pronounces us righteous for His sake. It’s a free gift.

This gift, then, is received through faith. That’s why Jesus says, “Believe in the gospel.” To believe, biblically speaking, is not just to know about something in your head, with no connection to life. Rather, to believe is to trust, to entrust yourself to this gospel of Christ, to

know in your heart that this is your only hope of righteousness before God. “Believe in the gospel,” that is to say, trust in Christ your Savior. Take refuge in Him. He will save you – from your sins, from death, and eternal damnation. He will save you by the power of His resurrection unto eternal life, so that you will share in His resurrection on the last day. This is the content of our faith.

And this faith is worked in you by the Holy Spirit, creating faith and nurturing faith through the means of grace, Word and Sacrament. The fact that you trust in Christ your Savior – this is itself a gift from God. The Holy Spirit gave you this gift of faith in Holy Baptism, and He continues to strengthen your faith as you receive Christ’s body and blood in the Holy Supper. Yes, God’s mighty word creates and awakens the very faith it calls for.

Now such preaching isn’t bait that attracts folks. That’s why it’s so seldom heard in so many places. The Law and the Gospel are offensive to those who are perishing. But to those of us who are being saved, the blessed Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). It is a net that is cast for all. So there is nothing else for me to preach than the Apostolic message and teaching of Jesus Christ. There is no other Truth. There is no other Gospel. Jesus Christ is the Son of God who suffered in your place for your sins. He has conquered death and the grave once and for all!

Dear friends, Jesus comes to us today, here, in this place, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Hear His voice and heed His call. Jesus comes to us today, to our Galilee, to our fishing boats, summoning us to the new life of adventure He has for us as His disciples, speaking to each one of us his powerful words of life, “Follow me.” God grant that we do so follow Him in repentance and faith now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener