

January 9, 2022 7 Words OF Jesus Mark 1:14-20 Pt. 2

Mark's Gospel opens with a declaration of what it is going to be about... "about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mark 1:1) Mark simply declares the agenda. He is writing about Jesus. And therefore, he makes the divinity declaration. The Jesus, he is writing and talking about is the Son of God. Plain talk. Focused talk. A clear agenda.

So, he points out that the ministry of John the Baptist was spoken of in the words of the prophet Malachi in the Old Testament. He says that not only did John baptize people with water, he talked about another whose sandals he was not worthy to untie. That task, untying the shoes of the master, was done by the lowest of household servants. John the Baptist was talking about Jesus and setting the record straight. John is God's, and therefore Jesus' servant.

Then Mark tells us how Jesus came to John at the Jordan to be baptized. Today there are bleachers at that site. I sat and I watched as my daughter, Rev. Rebekah, baptized two members of the congregation of St. Andrew's Brampton, whom she was serving at the time. They were part of our tour group and they had come to Israel for that one precise reason: to be baptized where Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. It was a very meaningful part of our walking in the "footsteps of Jesus."

Each week in this series, I am going to remind you of the other words of Jesus we have taken time to hear. Last week

we listened once again to the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus the pharisee. It was to this teacher of the Law and the prophets, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” It is important. It is so important, it had to be the first word of Jesus in this series.

The second word of Jesus we are going to consider in this series is in Mark chapter 1, verses 14 and 15. Mark tells us that “after John the Baptist was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘the time has come,’ Jesus said, ‘the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.’” Several things here require our attention, not only as we begin the journey of faith, but as we remember we have dedicated years of our lives in this pursuit.

“The time has come,” is a significant phrase. Even in our times, when someone says, it is time, we know we have to attend to business that is serious and urgent. I can remember as if it were yesterday, the morning of September 15th 1975. I made the short walk from the office of the new church building, to our home. Barbara was seated on the sofa. Beside her sat a woman named Claire, the wife of one of the elders of the church. Claire said, “I’ll be going.” And then she put her hand on my shoulder and said, “It’s time.” I had no idea what was going on. As the door closed behind Claire, Barbara announced... “the baby is coming.” I was scared and excited all at once. Rebekah was born just after 9:00 pm that evening. I had held Barbara’s hand throughout the labour. It was a marvelous and difficult experience. And our lives went through

a great change. I was suddenly a minister, a husband, and the father of two children.

The importance of Jesus words, “the time has come.” Is of even greater significance. Jesus proclaimed that the “kingdom of God was near.” Not that it might come some time in the future, but that it was imminent. Near. Accessible. Requiring us to take action if we wanted to be a part of it. You and I have been engaged in the work of the Kingdom of God, for, in some cases, most of our lives. Jesus announced to those who would hear HIM in Galilee, that the time had come.

That the Kingdom is near means there is stuff to do. First of all, the King must be recognized. Jesus is the King, in fact HE is the King of Kings. What that means is that our first allegiance is to HIM, and HIM alone. Because of who Jesus is, the Son of God, this is a radical allegiance. Radical does not mean it is weird or violent in its nature. It means that it is the root of who we are and what we are to do. In the service of the King of Kings, we become our best selves, and we look for opportunities to serve others. Jesus calls us to love our neighbours, all of them. He calls us to love the down and out, and not to judge them. But to assist them. He calls us to set free those who are in bondage. The concept of the brotherhood of man, and the sisterhood of women is a singular Christ centered concept. And in fact, it has changed the world for the better. The world is not a perfect place. The Church is not a perfect institution. Followers of Jesus are not “perfect people.” We need to remember we are forgiven by the grace of

God and called to be a servant people. Servants of the King, given to the service of others. The Church is unquestionably at its best, when it remembers that: that it is here, for the benefit of others.

Jesus said, in this very context, “repent.” To repent, is to seek forgiveness for the sins we know we have committed, and those that we do not realize we have done. To repent, of sins is important. It involves humbling ourselves before God and before the people we have hurt or offended. Saying, “I am sorry,” allows people on both sides of a relationship to heal, and to regain trust. But that is only half of the repentance equation. Repentance also involves an attempt at change in our behaviour. When we repent, we seek God’s help not to repeat the offence. We begin to work at walking a better path. All of us are works in progress. As we learn more about God’s grace, we seek to mirror that grace. Some of the rough edges of our character has to be sanded away. We seek actively in repentance to become more like Jesus.

Jesus also said, “And believe the good news.” Faith is crucial. And because we are human faith is often the hardest part. In fact as I say that I am mindful of how we want things to be logical, and reasonable. Logic and reason are not things we should denigrate or hold in disdain. But the fact is logic and reason will always tempt us to trust our humanity and the ways of the world over the radical claims that God in Christ makes upon our lives. We are called to believe the good news. The good news is that the Kingdom of God is near. It requires of us

to seek a renewing of our minds, an adjustment to our set. We do not naturally like change, especially when it comes to changing our lifestyle. Well, believing the good news that Jesus is the Son of God, and in HIM, the Kingdom of God is near, requires a major adjustment in our lifestyle and the way we view the world.

If there was one thing Jesus did not like, it was judgementalism. Many of his conversations with the Pharisees, had to do with this very human tendency. The Kingdom is not about building walls and keeping people out, it is about loving people and drawing them into the circle. Believing the good news means sharing the good news with anyone who will receive it. Sometimes we discover we have preferences about who we think should be inside the circle of the faithful. It doesn't work that way. The wind of the Spirit of God brings to us those whom God wants brought into our lives and experience. Believing means loving without conditions. Jesus did not set a standard to which we must adhere in order to receive HIS love. He died on Calvary's cross that those who wanted it, new life, saving love, might be drawn to HIM.

“The time has come, Jesus said. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.” This is the word of the Lord.

Let us pray;

Lord Jesus, we bow our heads before you, because you are the King who has come to redeem us and you bring

your Kingdom into our lives. We thank you and praise you for this good news that the Kingdom is available to us. Help us to repent of what we are aware we have done that is sinful in your sight, and sensitize us to sins of which we are guilty, but have not recognized. Make your grace sufficient for our needs. And help us to believe when we think we have reached the limits of our faith. Open our eyes to see ever more of the degree to which you love us, and the degree to which we must love those around us. Grant that we might be more like our YOU. In Jesus name we ask this. Amen