

September 11, 2016
The National Presbyterian Church
What Jesus Said: Time for A Change?
Mark 1:9-17
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Throughout the fall our sermons are going to focus on “*What Jesus said*” – the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth as we find it in Mark’s account of his ministry, which is the shortest account of the four accounts of Jesus’ ministry that we have in the Bible.

Of course, in focusing on Jesus, we could *just as much* be focusing

- On “*What Jesus did*” (as what he said) – because Jesus set the perfect example for us to follow.
- Or we could be focusing on “*Who Jesus was*” – the perfect blend of perfect humanity and divinity in one person: *fully human, fully God*

And we’ll certainly touch on these in the course of the series.

In fact, the very reason Mark gives us in the first place *for sharing the story of Jesus at all*, is NOT that he was a great teacher, NOR that he was an inspiring religious leader, but simply that Jesus was who he said he was: Mark believed that Jesus was “the Son of God,” God’s unique presence on earth. And in the opening line of his whole account of Jesus’ ministry, Mark tells us this clearly: Mark 1:1

“*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ* (the genitive “of” can mean “about” Jesus Christ, or the good news that comes “from” Jesus Christ) – *the Son of God.*” (A declaration about Jesus echoed at the end of the gospel by the centurion at the cross, Mark 15:39).

So, right off the bat, Mark gives us the reason why he shares *the story of Jesus in writing*.

- Inspiring teaching? Yes!
- Teaching of a great religious leader? Yes!
- But above all else, this is the life and these are the words of *the Son of God!*

AND there are lots of them in Mark’s account. Jesus -- the Son of God -- said many things about many topics. And in the coming weeks we’ll certainly cover some of them. But *as a* brief summary preview of “What Jesus said” what we find is this, that Jesus speaks about . . .

2:5, 9 FORGIVENESS

Son, your sins are forgiven.

2:17 HUMAN WEAKNESS AND OUR NEED OF HELP:

those who are well have no need of a physician;

3:33 COMMUNITY

“Who are my mother and my brothers? (he asks)

4:9 LISTENING

“Let anyone with ears to hear, listen.”

10:6 MARRIAGE

“From the beginning of creation God made them male and female”

11:17 PRAYER

My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations

6:31 SELF CARE

Come away to a deserted place and rest awhile.

4:24 GENEROSITY

The measure you give will be the measure you get.”

8:31 – HIS OWN PERSON

“I will be killed, he says, and after three days rise again”

12:17 POLITICS

“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s”

10:44 LEADERSHIP

“whoever wishes to be great must become the servant of all”

4:40 FAITH

“Why are you Afraid? Have you no faith?”

13:8, 22 END OF TIME

Nation will rise against nation;

But of the day and hour of the end, no one knows

And we add to this list our focus today: Jesus speaks as well (in fact he starts his teaching – by speaking) about TIME and CHANGE.

In our own passage (1:15), he says

***“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;
So . . . repent and believe in the good news.”***

These are the very first words out of Jesus’ mouth in Mark’s account.

So, what’re they about? What is this *opening statement* in the story of Jesus, this *summary statement* of all that follows, about?

***The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;
Repent! And believe in the good news!***

Well clearly, something has happened *in time and space, here and now*, says Jesus, something has happened *in the History of the World* that is so significant that it demands a response: repentance and belief.

“World History,” of course, is filled with extraordinary events in space and time. Moments in time that change the world. Sometimes slowly, sometimes overnight.

(A) Sometimes it’s because of inventions . . .

- So go back to around 1440, and think about Guttenberg, and the day that the printing press was invented.
- Or fast forward -- to the late 1970’s and the invention of personal computers
- Or then to January 9, 2007, and the first I-phone, the first smart-phone, is unveiled
Steve Jobs told us how to respond; at first I refused, but now, I and *over 2 billion others have smart phones (out of the world’s 7 billion people)*.

So the world is changed at such moments as these by great inventions.

**(B) And changed as well, unfortunately, -- not just by great inventions
but by moments of war and terror.**

In ancient Israel, Jerusalem was decimated on two occasions that changed the course of Jewish history. *In the long run, paradoxically, those devastating moments were seminal informing our Bible and in creating modern Judaism*

- In 586 BC by the Babylonians
- and then again -- in May of AD 70 by the Romans

Or fast forward to World War II and think of the impact of

- December 7, 1941 {Pearl Harbor}
- or June 6, 1944 – {and the beaches of Normandy}

These were moments in space and time in which (in a radical way) our world was changed

And among these life-changing dates, of course, September 11, 2001 (15 years ago today): an attack on our own soil!

- For some, their lives tragically and suddenly *ended or scarred*
- AND for all, the issue of terrorism and fear rising to a level across the world that most of us have never seen in our lifetimes.

One single moment, one single event or act in space and time quite beyond our choice – and life changes radically.

(C) **AS it can too** not just when something dramatic and huge happens, but also when something seemingly far less dramatic, but equally powerful, happens:

Think of the moment, for example when a child is born: the day of a birth; or the first day of college. These are momentous times, that change the life of a parent, or a child, or a home for ever.

Or simply think of the power in those times when ordinary people walk into our lives, sometimes unexpectedly, out of the blue.

One of my favorite stories is about Jack Elliott, a Prisoner of War in World War II who was presumed dead by his family. But in December, 1944, he returned safely to the United States after a remarkable escape.

Here in Washington, he met his sister Lee, and together they decided that the best way to break the good news of his survival to their mother, Martha was not by phone, but in person. Martha still lived on the family farm just outside Richmond, VA. So, Jack and Lee headed to the farm by bus and taxi.

In an article for the Washingtonian, Jack's daughter, Laura, described the scene that happened after that. She says.

"Inside the house, Martha heard the sound of car wheels on gravel; and wondered who would visit so close to dinnertime.

Then she froze. The army delivered death notices in person.

She walked to the door. *'Don't cry in front a stranger'* she told herself and looked out.

Jack's aged dog, a pointer by the name of Speed, was dancing around a terribly thin man, bent over, trying to pet him.

'Strange,' thought Martha. *'I haven't seen Speed act that way since Jack left.'*

Oh my Lord,' she said to herself! *'Jack!'* she cried out, throwing open the door. Jack stood and opened his arms.

They held each other for a long time, not saying a word. Finally Martha pulled away -- and put her hand over her heart. It hurt in the most wonderful way.

In "A Wing and a Prayer" by Laura Elliott, in Stories in Uniform, 2013.

A single moment. The absence and then presence of another. And life is never the same again.

In many ways, that's what Jesus is saying as his ministry begins

- Someone is *now* here, who wasn't here in the same way before;
- Someone whose coming, whose presence, changes everything.

"The time is fulfilled," (we're at a new moment in time)

"and the kingdom of God has come near" (*something has happened*)

"The Kingdom of God"

is a term that can have various meanings . .

- Kingdom can mean 'authority': "*The Reign & Rule of God*"
- Kingdom can mean 'community': "*The Realm where God is King*"

But behind those meanings, one thing is clear: there is no Kingdom, there is no reign or rule or realm, -- unless there is a KING!!

And *the thing that is new*, to which Jesus points; *the thing that has happened* in space and time and that changes everything

is, in fact, that

- NOW, THE KING IS HERE! . . . in the person of Jesus himself . . .
- THE KING OF HEAVEN HIMSELF IS HERE on earth: in flesh and blood; in space and time.

And when you believe it – that something this significant has happened in time:

- *like a baby* coming into your house
- *or Jack the POW* returning (as it were) from the dead
- *or like being able to own a book*
- *or a use a smart phone* for the first time

then it will necessarily begin to turn your world around and change everything.

"Repent!" says Jesus. In other words:

- STOP – TURN AROUND! And allow the power of what has happened in this moment in time to filter into all you think and say and do.
- Let it be more powerful than all the evil moments in the world
 - *the destruction of Jerusalem*
 - *the ships being destroyed in Pearl Harbor*
 - *the Towers coming down!*
- Let it be more powerful for peace
 - *than the storming of the Normandy beaches*
 - *or the inventions that have changed our lives*

. . . this knowledge: that at a specific moment in time, for 30 years, the love of God was so strong that *God the King* humbled himself to join us in flesh and blood on earth. Let this be transformative Good News.

Frederick Buechner puts it like this:

“Those who believe in God can never in a way, be sure of Him again. Once they have seen Him in a stable (i.e., once they believe that at a specific moment in time, God the King came first, even as a baby, to live on earth), they can never be sure where He will appear or to what lengths He will go, to what ludicrous depths of self-humiliation He will descend in His wild pursuit of our lives. This means that there is no place that we can hide from God, no place where we are safe from His power to break in two -- and recreate the human heart.”

Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons, by Frederick Buechner
(New York, N.Y., Harper Collins Publishers, 2007, pp.23-24).

God the King came to us –

In space and time. In flesh blood. In sight and sound. And -- having done it once in the Body, what we know and what we can stake our lives on, is that he will never cease doing it in the Spirit.

“The time is fulfilled” --

Something incredible has happened in space and time, more powerful than the best and worst of all other events and moments in history

“The kingdom of God has come near”

God the King has entered our human story

So . . . **DO SOMETHING!!**

Repent!! And believe this good news.

Stop! Turn Around! This is not one event among many

- *It's 9/11 and twin towers falling, terrorists on our own turf!*
- *It's December 7 and Pearl Harbor!*
- *It's 1440 and the printing press!*
- *It's AD 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem!*
- *It's Jan 9, 2007 and the advent of the smart phone*
- *It's AD ONE –through 32: and God is on earth in flesh and blood!*

Let it filter in and overwhelm and change you,

and change every other moment in space and time -- for good!!

“It's time for a change,” says Jesus, **YOUR king! THE King, is here!**

That's what Jesus said.

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