

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.¹⁵ “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.¹⁷ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets.²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. (Mark 1:14-20)

The Time has Come!

Sometimes, it's just time for something to happen. This past week, I read that rationing during World War II led to shorter skirts and two piece bathing suits. I wonder if that was the real cause or if the time had just come for a change in fashion. At the end of this year, we'll have another election. It will be time for us to vote and that means that by late summer, it will be time for our TV sets to blast a steady stream of political commercials. I read this week – and I am not making this up – that the bass player of the acid rock band Megadeth is studying at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis to be ordained as a Lutheran pastor in the Missouri Synod. Does that mean that it's time for a hard rock, contemporary Lutheran worship service? I kind of hope not, but you never know. Time brings everything that's going to happen to the moment when it does happen. That truth was on the mind of Jesus in the gospel lesson for today. He wasn't talking about the bass player for Megadeth or fashion or election year advertising. But he declared: **The time has come!**

I.

Jesus said, **“The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”** What time was he talking about? The time for the fulfillment of all that God had been planning and promising for Israel. The kingdom of God was near. God's kingdom doesn't come with borders and passports and the trappings of a human government. God's kingdom is his ruling. Jesus rules now, by claiming our hearts and making us his. One day soon, Jesus will return and rule openly. He will begin that rule by judging the world and sending sinners to hell. Then he will bring us into eternal life forever. All that was near because Christ had finally come. You can't have a kingdom without the King. Jesus was the king God had been promising for at least a thousand years.

So now that the time had come and the kingdom was about to arrive, how did Jesus want his people to respond? How does he want us to respond? Jesus wasn't looking for Jews of his day to overthrow the Roman Empire and set up his own kingdom in Jerusalem. And he's not looking to us to win the presidency and the congress in November and put a Christian regime in place here in the United States. His kingdom is within us. He rules in our hearts, no matter who rules over our bodies. So what are we to do now that the coming is almost here? Jesus said, **“Repent and believe the good news!”**

Jesus calls us to repent of our sin. That's how we prepare to see his kingdom come. Notice, he doesn't get terribly specific about which sins he's talking about. No doubt, on a day to day basis as he preached and taught, he did mention specific sins. Mark gives us here a summary of what he taught. But the summary does not need a listing of specific sins, because more than telling us to repent of what we *do*, Jesus calls us to repent for what we *are*. We are sinners. Nothing that a sinner does can please God. If you watch the news, you see stories about murder and robbery and other violent crimes. And it's easy for us to shake our heads at those terrible people out there who do things like that because we don't think that we ever will do those things. For the same reason, when we talk about specific sins here in church – even far less violent sins, like lust and selfishness, it's easy for us to nod our heads and think to ourselves, “You tell ‘em, pastor,” without seriously looking at ourselves.

There most certainly is a time and place to talk about specific sins that we are guilty of. But even if I never come up with a specific sin that convicts you while you're here at church, what God says about what you are applies to you. You were born a sinner. The best that you could ever do is corrupted by sin. When I preach a sermon and point you to Christ, because I'm a sinner, my sermon is contaminated by sin. The same is true for you. When you do your best – when you take time for your children or your spouse, when you serve in the

church, when you give a rich offering to the Lord or help out a person who's in need, even then, you are still a sinner. Everything that you do in this life, every word you say, every thought you think, every feeling that you have in your heart is contaminated by sin. That sin makes us guilty before God.

That's hard for us to accept. We like to think of ourselves as good people. But God's standard for us is not just being good. It's not just being great. It's being perfect every minute of every day of our lives, perfect in our thoughts and our feelings and our words and our deeds. And we're not. It's not that if we try hard we can be perfect for a while and then we mess up. We can't be perfect for one second. Sin has totally penetrated every aspect of our existence. That sin condemns us to hell forever.

Repentance recognizes that truth. It sees that if Christ were to return today and judge on the basis of my actual life and heart, he should condemn me to hell. But Jesus said, "Repent and believe the good news!" The good news is that God has a solution for our sin. The good news is that we are not going to spend one minute in hell because Jesus has already taken care of that problem. That's the time that it was in Israel when he came, time for the King to win the battle that sets us free from death and hell.

Jesus did that first of all by being the perfect person that you and I can never be. He had no sin in his heart. So from the moment he was born until the moment he died, he never sinned. He never resented his mother when she told him to help with the dishes or get ready for bed. He never lusted or coveted. He never said an angry or a selfish word. He never hurt anyone or did anything that was egotistical or self-centered or in any way contrary to what God commands. He was perfect. But he didn't do that so that we could see how bad we are. He didn't even do that to give us an example of how we should live. He did that because we can't. He lived in our place. His life counts as ours.

Then Jesus went to the cross and he suffered the hell and the death that we have coming. God poured on him all the sin and all the guilt that all the people who will ever live deserve. That includes you and me. He died and he paid for us. Then he rose from the dead and he announced that our sins are forgiven. My friends, Jesus died for you. God has forgiven you. When the Lord returns – or when you die, whichever comes first – and you appear before his throne to be judged, you will enter eternal life and you will live with Jesus forever. All that is yours because of the Holy Spirit's gift of repentance – we see our sin and throw ourselves on Jesus and God forgives us. **The time has come to repent and believe.**

II.

Jesus wants us to trust in what he did so that we have eternal life. But the only way that we could ever repent and trust in his work is if we hear that good news. So Jesus spent three years preaching and teaching. But he knew that was not the final solution. God in his wisdom chose to work through the ministry. Now, whenever a pastor preaches the gospel or a teacher explains God's word, Jesus is there. Only because he is working does our preaching or teaching do any good. But Jesus invented the New Testament ministry as the way that he would do that work. So this morning we see him calling four of the twelve disciples to ministry.

Now, if we only had the gospel of Mark, you would walk away with the impression that this happened immediately after he was baptized and that he just bumped into these guys by the Sea of Galilee and miraculously moved them to answer his call. But the other three writers tell us more. This was at least six months after Jesus was baptized, maybe longer. And it was not the first time Jesus had met these men. In fact, Peter and Andrew met him in Jerusalem the week he was baptized. And they had heard him preach and seen him do several miracles by this time.

But this was the moment that changed everything for these four men. Jesus called them to leave behind their old lives and become "fishers of men" – and they understood exactly what that meant. No fish wants to wind up in a fisherman's boat and no unbeliever wants to wind up in the church. But if he doesn't make it into God's boat, he won't make it to heaven. So God gives the church the job to go out and find them. Not to wait here for them to come in, but to actually get up and bring the gospel to people who need to hear it. These four men were called to that.

To this day, God chooses to work through the New Testament ministry. God could've done something else. He could've made every member responsible for teaching and sharing the gospel and had no ministry at all. Or he could've sent angels to preach. But he didn't choose to do either of those things. In his infinite wisdom, God chose to call and to work through sinful men and women called into the ministry.

How do you feel about that? It doesn't let you off the hook and it doesn't exclude you. God does call all Christians to share the gospel. He calls all Christian parents to teach it to their children. He calls all

Christians to be prepared to explain Christ to the unbelievers around them. He calls every member to teach and encourage and discipline every other Christian. My work is your work. The only difference between what God calls me to do and what he calls you to do is that he calls me to do it publicly, in the name of the whole congregation, while he calls you to do it privately. But it is your work. And God calls you to share in the public work I do. God expects you to support it financially and with your prayers and also with your time and your efforts. God never designed the church to be divided between the guys who work and the guys who sit in the pew. This is your ministry, every bit as much as it is mine.

Do you make it yours? Do you pray for your pastors and teachers? Do you take the time to encourage them to be faithful? Do you regard the men and women God sends as his gifts to you? Do you participate in the ministry of your congregation? Everything that you do – teaching Sunday school or counting the offering or cleaning the school all works to spread the gospel. What have you done lately to be a part of that work? How do you share that good news about Jesus?

Some of us have to admit that we haven't done much at all. We haven't contributed prayers or offerings, time or talents. It's easy to forget that the ministry is God's plan, so it's not optional. It's also easy to forget that it's his gift to us, his people. That's just sinful. It's an example of how that sinful nature forces itself onto our lives. That sin deserves God's punishment in hell forever. But that's why Jesus came, to forgive all our sin. The only perfect member and the only perfect minister was Jesus. He was perfect for us. He died for our failures to support the work God has called all of us to do. He rose and God has wiped all that sin away. You are forgiven.

God calls us to be fishers of men. He calls us to be ready to announce that good news to others to free them from guilt and sin. He calls us to support the work our congregation does in reaching out with the gospel so that we can pull more people into God's boat here at Peace. The Board of Stewardship and Outreach is preparing various outreach efforts for the coming year. You'll hear about those efforts soon and you will be asked to participate. Take the opportunity, because Jesus is your Savior. And pray for all our outreach efforts. Support them as God has gifted you because God chooses to work through us and our efforts to share his word.

The time has come to be fishers of men.

The kingdom of God is near. Christ is coming soon. While we wait, it's time to repent of our sin and to trust that he has forgiven it all. And it's time to reach out with the good news and be fishers of men. It's that time for all of us. Recognize what time it is and trusting in your Savior, do the work God has given us to do. Amen.