

**The Time is Now**  
**Mark 1:14-20**  
**January 21, 2018 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany**

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe the Good News.” Friends, welcome to the Gospel of Mark. Some of you know that our lectionary follows a three year cycle, one year of Matthew, one of Mark, and one of Luke, with the Gospel of John intermixed across all three years. Well, as of the beginning of Advent, we have entered the year of Mark. We didn’t hear much about Mark until last week, because Mark does not have a birth narrative, a Christmas Story. Mark begins with the Baptism of Jesus, but I love the Gospel of Mark. I love Mark not just because it’s my namesake. I love Mark for its literary structure and it’s message of inclusiveness of all people; and you’ll be hearing a good deal more about that throughout this coming year. But today. . . today the story begins.

We heard about the baptism of Jesus last week and about Mark’s brief account of the temptation of Jesus. I like to consider that the prologue, for the baptism and the temptations are what lead to the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry. But today the ministry begins.

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe the Good News.” These are the first words which Mark reports Jesus saying. Saying to whom, we’re not sure. We’re told that Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news, apparently to anyone who would listen. What Good News? You know the answer to that – the Good News of God’s Amazing Love; and those aren’t just words. We will see, as the Gospel continues, the Good News is a lot more than words on a page. The Good News is a way of life. As Christians we are called to live the Good News; and therein lies the call to repentance.

I’ve stated before, the word “repent” does not mean simply to say “I’m sorry” no matter how sincere that statement might be. No, the word “repent” means to change directions, to turn around. The word “repent” means to go a different way, to live differently, to turn and walk in the path of Christ.

A moment ago, I asked to whom Jesus uttered the call to “repent and believe the Good News.” I believe with all my heart that he uttered it to you and to me. You see, one of the things I love about the Gospel of Mark is that we can read these wonderful sixteen chapters on two levels. Of course we read them in their historical context, so we imagine ourselves in that first century audience, walking the dusty roads of Galilee, gathering with the crowd, and listening the Nazarene carpenter. But the amazing thing is that these words are alive and spoken to each of us twenty-one centuries later. Mark says it himself, when in the middle of chapter thirteen he parenthetically adds: “(Let the Reader Understand.)” Mark is

not just speaking to his first century readers. No, he's speaking to every reader, and everyone who will ever read this wonderful story of God's love.

And so, along with those first century souls of Galilee, Jesus calls us, you and me, to repent, to turn to the light and to believe the best news the world has ever know, the news of God's amazing love. That's the beginning of the story; and next comes the beginning of the ministry. Jesus did not work alone. Jesus could not work alone. If Jesus had worked alone, the ministry of Jesus Christ, and the Good News of God's Love would have died on Calvary. No, to start a ministry, Jesus needed people. So, Jesus was walking along the shore, along the Sea of Galilee, and he saw Simon, the one who Jesus would later call Peter, and his brother Andrew fishing for they were fishermen; and Jesus issued that famous line: "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." Follow me, and I'll show you what's really important. Follow me, and together we will change people's lives. Follow me, and together we will live the Good News of God's love. Now, I don't know what else Jesus said to Simon and Andrew. I don't know what kind of push the Holy Spirit gave Simon and Andrew, but the call of the Good News must have been truly amazing for we're told that *immediately* they left their nets and followed him.

Friends, I struggled with a call to ordained ministry for years; and after I decided that call was truly authentic, it took me nine years before I entered seminary; and it took eleven years after that before I was finally ordained. It was a long process. But Simon and Andrew *immediately* left their nets and followed him. Now, don't lose sight of that word "immediately." It's one of Mark's favorite words. You may remember that Mark reported last week, after Jesus was baptized, *immediately* the Spirit drove him into the wilderness. Here *immediately* the disciples left their nets. And they had only walked a little further down the shore, when they saw two more fishermen, James and John, the sons of Zebedee; and *immediately* he called them, and they left their father in the boat and followed him.

You know, I always wondered about Zebedee. We really don't know anything about Zebedee. Did James and John head off with Jesus with their father's blessing; or did they simply abandon poor Zebedee and the family business to follow this itinerate preacher? We're told that there were also hired men in the boat with Zebedee. We can hope that working with them, Zebedee was able to make ends meet. Still, I sometimes put myself in Zebedee's place, and ask how I would react to this situation,

But putting that aside, Jesus has now called four men, Peter and Andrew, James and John, and a ministry has begun; and, I tell you Jesus is still calling people. Some people respond immediately, and some of us take a little longer; but Jesus is still calling people like you and like me; and the ministry is continuing.

One of the most amazing things about Christianity is the people that Jesus calls. It was three weeks ago that I talked about the humility of the Shepherds on that Christmas Eve. The “night shift shepherds,” the lowest of the lowly were the first Christian evangelists. And here, Jesus calls four fishermen to be his first ministers – not scribes or Pharisees, not learned individuals, humble fishermen would be entrusted with the most important ministry of all time, the spreading of the Good News of God’s Amazing Love.

Friends, I’ve mentioned before that “Our Guiding Principles” of “Our Faithful Journey” long range plan are printed on the back of your bulletin; and they have been ever since they were adopted by our Administrative Board. Today, when you leave church, you will be given one of these booklets briefly outlining Our Faithful Journey. I hope you’ll take it home and read it. But, I hope you will do more than just read it. Prayfully consider our five guiding principles; and ask yourself if any one particularly speaks to your heart. Then continue in prayer over that principle. How might Christ be calling you to further that particular guiding principle? Can you play a part in one of the programs outlined in this booklet? Or, are you being called to a different program? The goal of this plan is to further the ministry of this church, immediately and for the next several years. Please join me in praying for this ministry; and join me in moving this ministry forward.

The kingdom of God has come near. How is God calling this church to spread the Good News? How is God calling each of us to spread the Good News? May God give us the wisdom, the strength, the courage and the faith to immediately follow Jesus, wherever God may lead.

Let us pray. . .

Holy Lord,  
Lead us and guide us.  
Guide us as individuals and guide us as a church  
that we might spread the Good News of your Amazing Love  
through our thoughts, through are words,  
and most importantly through our actions,  
to all whom we meet,  
every moment of every day of our lives.  
Amen.

Rev. Mark L. Steiger, Pastor  
North Olmsted United Methodist Church