

GO! BE THE CHURCH
"Mission Evangelization as a Strategy for
Congregational Transformation"

Week Two: Proclaiming the Good News
Text: Mark 1-3

Day One
Read Mark 1

Every Christian is a Christian because someone told him or her the wonderful story of Jesus and His love. There may be a few people to whom God revealed himself directly — the Apostle Paul being one notable example — but most of us heard about Jesus through the faith sharing of another person: parents, a friend, a sweetheart, or a spouse, a teacher or preacher. And most of us hear the Gospel many times before we “get it.”

Look at Mark 1:2-15 and notice particularly verses 14-15:

“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” Mark 1:14-15 (NRSV)

God sent a Messenger ahead of Jesus Christ to announce his coming. His authority to do so was supported by the prophecies of Malachi (3:1), and Isaiah (40:3). John the baptizer appeared calling the people to repentance as a sign of the coming Kingdom of God.

John was clear about his subordinate role to the one who was to come (vs. 7) and he knew that water was not all there was to baptism. It must be also infused with the power of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus’ coming and his significance to anyone who would listen.

Now turn to Mark 1:29-45.

Jesus has called his first four disciples: Simon Peter, his brother Andrew, and James and John, the sons of Zebadee. All are fishermen, untrained in religion, but willing, nonetheless to follow Jesus and learn. Did they know him or of him prior to their call to follow? We get the sense from reading Mark that Jesus walked down to the dock where the men were working, asked them to follow, and they left everything behind to follow a stranger. Maybe — maybe not. This is an unimportant detail to Mark. The significance of the moment is that they said “yes” to Jesus – not how long it took them to do so.

They make a stop at the home of Peter’s mother-in-law. She is in bed, sick, and Jesus heals her. And then, as word quickly spreads of her recovery, many people are brought to him to be healed. Demons are cast out and not permitted to speak – not permitted to reveal to the crowd who Jesus really is. Why? Was he wanting people to hear the proclamation (1:14-15) first? Did he want to prevent any misunderstandings the people had about the role of the Messiah? Did he want to avoid being overrun with people needing to be healed?

All day long he teaches and heals. There seems to be an unending stream of people who are sick and want the

healer to make them well. Finally, Jesus and his 4 disciples are given a reprieve and they sleep. But Jesus gets up very early in the morning to go and pray alone (vs.35-37).

Upon arising, Simon Peter and his companions go looking for Jesus. It seems that his mother-in-law's home is filling up again with people wanting to see Jesus. "Everyone is searching for you," Simon says. If you look at vs. 38 and 39, you will discover what came of his time alone in prayer. He must go away and proclaim his message. "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; **for that is what I came out to do.**" His time with God helped him reclaim his first priority: proclaiming the Good News. He will demonstrate over and over again in his ministry that healing is important, but it is a by-product of the message he has come to reveal and the gracious gift of a loving God. Moving on demonstrates the urgency of the message that Jesus has come to share. The Kingdom of God has come near.

There are many lessons we can learn from the examples of John and Jesus about the importance of proclaiming the Good News. What are they?

Day Two

The Four Parts of the Gospel

Gospel means "good news". The Bible contains the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus proclaims it in one sentence: "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe the good news.*"

First, notice the context of Jesus' announcement. As Jesus makes known his mission, John the Baptist is arrested for publicly challenging the marriage of King Herod Antipas to his brother's wife, Herodias by calling it unlawful and adulterous. Sometime later, Herod gave a dinner party and he asked his stepdaughter and niece to dance for his dinner guests. She tricked him into promising her anything she wanted if she would dance. She danced, but what she wanted was the head of John the Baptist. Herod, being afraid of John, did not want to kill him, but she coaxed him into fulfilling his promise. John was beheaded. We forget that proclaiming the Gospel can be risky, even dangerous. It may cost us something. The witness of the martyrs is paid for in blood.

The Time is fulfilled. Jesus brings *kairos*, which, according to the Greek, is a moment in time filled with deep significance and meaning. It is time as God lives it in eternity. For Jesus, *kairos* is ever-present. But like the rest of us, the disciples were stuck in *chronos* or linear time, and never seemed to be able to understand what Jesus was teaching them, especially in the parables. They did not "get it". The parable of the

workers in the vineyard is a good example (Matthew 20:1-16). Read the parable. The workers who arrived early complained to the vineyard owner at the end of the workday because those who were hired later in the day received the same pay. The workers didn't get it, the disciples didn't get it, and very often we don't get it, either. The vineyard owner, who is in *kairos* declares, "*Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous? So the last will be first, and the first will be last.*" It was not about receiving a reward for doing a hard day's work. It was not a labor contract. It was not at all about the workers in any way, shape, or form. It was about the vineyard owner, his generosity, and the fact that once people DO "get it", the generosity of God and the perfection of the Kingdom of God remains the same for everyone – no matter when you finally "get it".

The Time is fulfilled, according to Jesus. The event and person the Hebrew people have been waiting for has come. John calls the people to repentance, preparing the way for Jesus. When Jesus comes to John to be baptized, God affirms Jesus' coming and calling: "*And a voice from heaven,*" declares, "*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*" Finally, in verse 15, Jesus proclaims that the time is fulfilled. The Kingdom of God has, indeed, come near in the person of Jesus Christ. And whereas John wished for people to repent SO THAT the Kingdom of God would come, Jesus proclaims that BECAUSE the Kingdom of God has come near, people need to repent and believe.

How does this difference in emphasis effect one's decision to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Day Three Read Mark 2

...and the Kingdom of God has come near. God's Kingdom is found wherever God reigns and it graciously emerges in the forgiveness of sin, in acts of mercy and justice, and in peace. The Kingdom of God is manifested "on earth as it is in heaven", and encompasses now and forever. Kingdom living calls God's people to live in obedience and to act within God's will. Our greatest teacher and example for Kingdom living is Jesus.

Read Mark 2: 18-21. A confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders has been festering. This rabbi – Jesus – is more interested in the spirit of the Law than in the letter of the Law. They knew that ignoring and rebelling against the Law of God had brought the people of Israel to the point of annihilation and the people of Judah had been taken into exile in the days of the kings and the prophets. This was a time of despair and national soul searching and they swore that would never happen again. The leaders would be schooled in the Law and the people would learn to obey every dot and tittle.

Now, here is a rabbi – a teacher – allowing his students to eat when they should be fasting, to work when they should be resting, to ignore the sweet traditions of Judaism. The Pharisees feel a need to point out that John’s disciples fast and Jesus’ disciples feast. Jesus’ answer: the parables of the coming of the Bridegroom and the new wine skins. He suggests that he is the bridegroom and while he is with his disciples, the wedding celebration is not the time for fasting. However, a time will come when the *“bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.”* The parable of the new wine skins suggests that you cannot expect a radically new understanding of living in the will of God (new wine) to fit into a system that measures the will of God by ultra-strict adherence to a behavioral code without regard for the real needs of people (old wine skins). New wine must have new wine skins.

Change. It is natural to prefer the comfort of an old, worn pair of loafers to the strangeness and stiffness of a new pair of shoes. It is natural to prefer the comfort of a well worn tradition than to move into unknown territory. It is natural to confuse traditionalism (a love for the status quo) with what is sacred or holy, and confuse comfort with virtue. And it is natural to resist change – *even if it costs a life.*

But, *perhaps*, the life (and in some cases the very existence) of your congregation is worth learning to walk in strange new shoes. *Perhaps* the health of your church is worth doing what it takes to change. *Perhaps* the eternal souls of people around you are worth venturing into unknown territory. *Perhaps* an amazing and vital

relationship with the living God working through the Body of Christ is worth examining what, in your church, is worship of the status quo and what is truly sacred and holy.

Reflect on your personal reaction to change, what may be traditionalism and what is truly holy in your church, and what it would take for your congregation to care about the lives of the least, the last, and the lost around you.

Repent. Repent means to change direction or to turn around. Christian conversion or transformation occurs when a person receives Jesus as Lord and Savior

Sadly, in many protestant churches – Methodism being no exception - we have lost much of the grace and power that accompany the acts of confession and repentance. There are few churches that still incorporate confession, repentance, and the acts of forgiveness into the worship experience. And, when polled, very few mainline Christians believe themselves to be sinners – they simply make mistakes. If we are to believe the Apostle Paul,

though, all of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Acknowledging that gives us the unfathomable joy of knowing the Grace of God and living into the freedom to learn, grow and deepen our faith.

Remember, Jesus said to repent BECAUSE the Kingdom of God has drawn nigh. Jesus declares that God's presence among humankind is Good News. Repentance offers people (and congregations) a way to come home to God. We can trust what Christ is proclaiming and live by faith.

Read Mark 2: 13-17. Jesus calls Levi, the tax collector, as the fifth disciple. Levi as a Jew collected taxes for the Romans. Taxes were set by quotas, but tax collectors were allowed to collect money on top of the quota. This was their salary. Tax collectors were hated because they not only collaborated with the oppressor, they lived off the misery of their fellow countrymen.

Jesus calls Levi to be a disciple and then has dinner at his home. In the Jewish tradition, sharing a meal with someone was an act of forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus was doing more than just enjoying Levi's hospitality. Levi repents and turns over a new leaf. Jesus accepts his act of repentance. But once again the Pharisees are upset because he is eating with sinners. Jesus' answer: Those who are well do not need a doctor. Levi, in spite of his reputation and way of making a living, is invited to join the company of disciples.

What kinds of people are invited to join your fellowship and what kinds of people are not invited to join your fellowship?

Day Four

... and believe in the Good News

Too many Christians give lip-service to the Gospel, "talking the talk, but not walking the walk". Even as they hear it, they rationalize in their minds:

- "That's for the end times or when I die and go to heaven."
- "It's true for someone who has a lot more faith than I do."
- "No one is really expected to live like Jesus did – it's unrealistic."
- "That's for people who are more religious than I am."

Belief, for many Christians, is an intellectual assent. It is a head thing – agreeing to a set of doctrines. It is not based on an experience within a relationship with Christ – a living and loving bond. However, a believer is one who trusts God to be there no matter what is going on in his or her life. Belief is the assurance that we are, indeed, in a life-saving relationship with Christ. "*We walk*

by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). Belief requires faith. *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen"* (Heb. 11:1).

Let's look at the story of the paralytic who was lowered through the roof by his friends – Mark 2:1-12. Jesus goes home again, and again many come to be healed. In the midst of his healing and teaching, a hole opens in the ceiling above his head, and a mat is lowered through the roof by four friends of the man who lies paralyzed before him. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven". The Pharisees have a fit because, according to their Law, only God can forgive sin. After answering their challenge, he tells the man to get up and walk, take his mat and go home. He does just that and the people are amazed.

The Gospel is proclaimed simply by the fact that the friends believed that if they got the paralytic to Jesus, Jesus would heal him. They acted on their faith when they tore open a hole in the roof and lowered the paralytic to the feet of Jesus. Jesus healed the paralytic as a response to the faith of his friends. They believed the Good News.

But there is something else happening in this story. The scribes confronted Jesus because they did not believe he had the authority to forgive sins. If Jesus had simply healed the paralytic, there probably would have been no confrontation. But he did more – he demonstrated the powerful effect Grace has on people. Jesus demonstrated God's availability to humankind. He knew that the paralytic was "frozen" with guilt or fear or

stubborn denial. Jesus demonstrated that knowing sin is forgiven can "thaw" even the toughest case and there can be life and movement and growth again.

Now, translate that image to your congregation. Is your church "frozen" – paralyzed – unable to move either right or left or stand and walk? If not, praise the Lord. If so, your church is among many hundreds of churches in the Florida Conference that are stuck and unable to go anywhere.

Now ask yourself: Am I apart of the problem or the solution? Am I one of the friends with the faith to believe that God can heal the paralysis? Am I part of the congregation that is paralyzed? Am I one of the Pharisees that believe the status quo is the answer along with a strict allegiance to the law and to the way is has always been done?

In the role you have chosen, what do you believe you need to do to heal the church of its paralysis? What roofs need to be broken through? What sins need to be forgiven? What traditions need to be changed to bring healing to the church?

receives the message and responds. Looking around, he says, “*Who are my mother and my brothers? Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my bother and sister and mother.*” Was Jesus rejecting his family? Probably not. He is, however, expanding his family to include those who receive and proclaim the Good News and live in the Kingdom of God.

Being a disciple requires a commitment to other disciples. It requires a commitment to the least, the last, and the lost in the world. It requires a commitment to Kingdom living. Many times a church is referred to as “a family”.

What is required to be a real family as Jesus defined it with Jesus as the head? What might that commitment look like?

Day Five

Read Mark 3

Jesus’ Disciples and Jesus’ Family

Re-read Mark 3:13-17. Jesus chose those “*whom he wanted, and they came to him.*” Jesus declares his disciples as those who are sent, “*to proclaim the message.*” They were given authority “*to cast out demons.*” Sounds a lot like what Jesus, himself, has been doing. Is that a coincidence?

Then there is Mark 3:31-33 – a truly challenging story. Jesus’ mother and brothers come to take him home because they perceive him to be making a public spectacle even loosing his mind. His mother and brothers are standing outside the circle of people surrounding Jesus. They send a messenger in to call him out. He