**Repent and believe in the gospel**  12/2/23 dkm

Read: Mark 1:1-20, Mark 6:14-29

Text: Mark 1: 14-20

Psalms: 103:1-14, 130, 139:1-6&23-24, 117

John’s preaching of repentance and baptising inn the Jordan attracted a lot of attention. As a prophet he was ready to call even kings to account, which he did with regard to Herod taking his brother’s wife. Mark tells us of John being put in prison and then martyred later in this gospel (6:18). It seems he was put in prison not long after baptising Jesus. Jesus immediately went into the desert where he was tempted for forty days, and after John was put in prison began his ministry (1:14). John had prepared the way for Jesus as seen in the preceding verses. The witness of John the Baptist would soon be extended and surpassed by the witness of the Father in and though the mighty works of Jesus (John 5:36). Tragically, no amount of evidence or facts convinces those who choose to remain blind.

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a village in the hills to the west of the Sea of Galilee. When Jesus began his ministry at the age of about thirty, he moved down to Galilee, a region as well as a lake. Luke tells us that Jesus had been rejected in his home town before coming to Capernaum (Luke 4:16-30). Capernaum was a sizable town on the north-west shore of the lake, today known as Tell Hum; it was close to Bethsaida, the town at the junction of the Jordan River and the lake. The sea or Lake of Galilee supported a thriving fishing industry in those days. Jesus came to Galilee, then to the lake and finally to Capernaum. Our subheadings are: ‘Gospel in Galilee’ and ‘Gathering fishermen’.

**1. Gospel in Galilee**

Mark began this book we call ‘the gospel according to Mark’ referring to ‘the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God’. The word ‘gospel’ means ‘good news’. Here in verse 14 he is again using the word ‘gospel’ telling us that ‘Jesus came to Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God’. He came to this region according to a prophecy of Isaiah (Mat 4:14), and at the precise time set by his father in heaven. This time had been set from eternity, and the time was ‘ripe’ for Messiah to come; corruption and violence was everywhere. We might compare Ukraine or Alice Springs or both!

John was not the Messiah but one coming after his was, one who would baptise not with water but with the Holy Spirit. So as not to be seen as competing with John, Jesus began his ministry after John was put in prison. John, of course, directed his followers to follow Jesus. Andrew was a follower of John initially (John 1:37, 40); but John’s gospel does not actually refer to Jesus calling any disciples except for Phillip (John 1:43).

Jesus came to Galilee preaching the gospel or good news. The good news is not exactly new news. Jesus spoke of fulfilment in terms of time. Something that was spoken of in the past was being fulfilled. God was preparing the way for the coming of his Son long before John the Baptist, even long before the prophet Isaiah in 700BC. The coming of Messiah was announced back in the time of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:15). The fulfilment of time refers God’s great plan of redemption for fallen mankind. It refers to the time of God’s intervention, his coming to earth to establish his kingdom, the kingdom of heaven as Matthew calls it (Mat 4:17). ‘Intervention’ is what is called for in Alice Springs and in Ukraine. How wonderful that God has already intervened in this fallen world to reconcile men and women to himself, and to each other. The Lord’s Prayer begins with ‘Your kingdom come’ and ends with, ‘Yours in the kingdom, the power and the glory’. O that this prayer was prayed with understanding and belief.

Jesus was inaugurating the kingdom of God on earth. God’s kingdom is not like other kingdoms, although it does have a king in Jesus Christ. It is a spiritual kingdom; ‘The kingdom of God is within you’ (Luke17:21). It is an invisible kingdom, growing with the addition of new believers in Jesus Christ. None who reject the kingship of Jesus can enter this kingdom. This kingdom is invisible to the world but clearly seen by God. It is visible to the extent that true believers belong to the visible church. Jesus said that his church will ‘prevail against the gates of Hades’ (Mat 16:19). Jesus gained victory over Satan at the cross and resurrection although Satan is not yet cast out completely (Rev 20:10). On the Day of the Lord the invisible kingdom of God will become visible, and all other kingdoms will disappear.

The arrival on earth of Jesus, the King of the kingdom of God, means the way is now open to enter this kingdom. To enter you must, ‘Repent, and believe in the gospel’, the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God (1:15, 1); some translations leave out the word ‘in’ but this little word is important because we are believing in a person not only a teaching or philosophy. Entering the kingdom of God is not based on pedigree or connections or good works. Repentance or confession of sin is essential. Sin is what cuts us off from God who is holy. Our sin is freely forgiven when we repent but repentant is a great barrier to us a proud human beings born into the kingdom of Satan.

Repentance must be accompanied by belief in the gospel or in Jesus Christ. We must believe that on the cross Jesus shed his blood for the cleansing of our hearts from sin. We must believe that Jesus rose again from the dead for our justification (Rom 24:25). Believing Jesus is risen means he is alive and we must accept his rule in our personal lives and in the life of the church, His church. Those listening to Jesus preach in Galilee did not know about the cross and the resurrection but within three years they would. This three years would be the most amazing years in the history of mankind, history that is HIS-story as they say!

**2. Gathering fishermen**

At the end of three years of ministry culminating in the cross and the resurrection, it would be necessary for someone to continue preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. Despite the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, and their misunderstanding of Matthew 16:18, Jesus did not arrange for any man to continue his ministry or the headship of his church; Jesus is still head of his church. What Jesus arranged for was twelve men called apostles to continue preaching the gospel and indeed to write down the good news in the books that we have today, and are now studying. While Jesus needed men to continue his ministry, it was not uncommon for rabbis to have disciples to assist them in their ministry. Jesus wanted disciples to assist him in his ministry here on earth. So after announcing the gospel of the kingdom of God, Jesus went off to gather disciples.

Jesus did not go to the temple in search of disciples. He did not go looking for rich or educated men. Jesus called hard working fishermen to come and follow him. You have to be up early to beat a fishermen to his work. When we got to the beach in India we always found the fishermen sorting their catch. Men in boats would take their nets out from the beach and then drag them to shore, with the help of a dozen or so men. In some places circular nets are thrown out over the water by a single fisherman.

While walking along the shore of Lake Galilee, Jesus saw men casting out their nets and dragging them in; he saw others sitting in their boat mending their nets after their nights work. He spoke to two brothers called Simon and Andrew as they threw their net into the water. Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fishers of men’ (1:16, 17). To our amazement, but apparently not theirs, they immediately left their nets and followed Jesus (1:18). Simon and Andrew may have been unschooled fishermen but they were not stupid. They knew that catching and selling fish was their livelihood. But they also knew that Jesus was like no other man. He spoke with authority and his words were not trivial but true and faithful words.

Simon Peter and his brother were not the only men to follow Jesus that day. As Jesus continued walking along the edge of the lake he came across two other fishermen sitting in a boat mending their nets (1:19). James and John were sons of Zebedee. Some think Zebedee was a rich man because of the hired servants (1:19), but Mark is probably showing that, while leaving their father to follow Jesus, their father still had servants to help him. These four fishermen left their jobs and their family to follow Jesus. They did so immediately because, as my minister once pointed out, Jesus might not come that way again.

These men were the first to hear the call of Jesus, ‘Follow me’ but they were not the last. The gospels go on to speak of others leaving their jobs and families to follow Jesus. Jesus actually teaches that this is the norm for all his followers. He says that, ‘whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’ (8:34). The rich young ruler was not ready to leave all his possession and follow Jesus. Jesus included family in his call to forsake all in order to become his disciple (Luke 14:33, 18:29).

Yet today many stumble when it comes to leaving a secure job or leave aging parents to follow him. A young couple known to me are preparing to leave our shores for one of the poorest nations in the world. Because the Lord has called them. I remember one young professional who could not bring herself to leave her secure job and become a missionary; she wanted both! While we were on the mission field Elizabeth’s father died and so did mine. I still remember the last time I saw him at the airport saying goodbye; he started weeping. I was comforted in the knowledge that my brother was helping him.

Friends, do not think that the call of Jesus comes only to missionaries and ministers. It comes to each and every person who follows him. It is the call of faith or belief. Belief means belief in the King who is all-powerful to provide all your needs and protect form all danger, physical and spiritual. Remember that following Jesus is more than holding to his commands and his teaching; we are not legalists or moralists. Following Jesus means following a person; it means believing in him with your whole heart and being, and being ready to do whatever he calls you to do, and go wherever he calls you to go- which may not be to a more comfortable place than you are in now!

Would you refuse to listen to or obey an earthly king? How much more should we listen to and obey the call of Jesus the king of heaven. Jesus did not have any part time or half-hearted followers in Galilee, and he does not have any part-time or half-hearted follower’s today- please remember this! He did have the ‘son of perdition’, Judas Iscariot, of course, but we know how he ended up. ‘Follow me and I will make you fishers of men is the call of Jesus even today. The question is, will you, like Peter and Andrew, and James and John, leave everything to follow him, and do so immediately. Remember, you may not hear His call tomorrow!