

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
March 8 & 9, 2014
John Crosby
Every Day: Message of the Gospel
Mark 1:15-17**

[Video shown.]

I got shivers down my spine when I saw that the first time. Often I still do. What strikes me when I listen to that, I who speak for a living, is that I bet nobody was taking notes that nobody forgot. When Lincoln spoke, no one took notes and no one forgot. Nobody took notes when Jesus taught either. He taught in a way that people would remember because it's natural to remember what changes your life. If you were around on 9/11, you remember where you were. If you were alive when President Kennedy was assassinated or when Neil Armstrong landed on the moon, you remember where you were. We remember the things that change our lives. The message of Jesus is supposed to be that way. It's supposed to have that same kind of urgency or else it's just—will this be on the final exam? Who cares?

These next six weeks I want us to experience again a refreshment of the urgency with which Jesus spoke so that no matter how many times you've read the story before, it might come alive for you so you would not have to take notes. The story of Jesus starts with the Gospel of Mark. Mark is the first of the stories about Jesus that actually gets written down. Then Matthew and Luke take Mark's Gospel and add stuff, other stories, to it. Then John comes from a different part of the Roman Empire and tells the story in a completely different way, but Mark's Gospel is the very first time we hear the words of Jesus. The apostle Peter apparently is in Rome and he is telling young John Mark, "Mark...and then Jesus did this and then Jesus said that and then I remember we went there." The bishop who gets the first copy of the Gospel of Mark says, "So Peter told John Mark all the stories about Jesus although not necessarily in order" but this is the one we are pretty sure comes first. It's from Mark, chapter 1. Verse 13 is where Jesus is led away into the wilderness and is tempted right after He has been baptized, like the baptism we just saw here.

Then a whole year goes by between Mark 1:13 and Mark 1:14. A whole year goes by after His baptism because this is not the time of Jesus. This is the time of John the Baptist. Huge crowds come to hear John the baptizer as he wails against the Romans and talks about one who is to come. Last week we told the story, "How beautiful are the feet on the mountains of the ones who bring good news." That was John the Baptist's role, but then something changes. Mark 1:14, Jesus' first words:

14 After John [the Baptist] was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee,

that's up north in Israel. Jesus went into Galilee,

proclaiming the good news of God. **15** "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

That was His message over and over.

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 send you out to fish for people." **18** At once they left their nets and followed him.

We're going to spend six weeks talking about, what is the Gospel and what difference does it make on Thursday afternoon wherever you are? What do you know about the Gospel and what difference does it make in your life, because it's got to be more than just words you write down to pass the test at the end? The first thing I notice about the Gospel is that Jesus comes at a very specific time, when John the Baptist had been arrested. Jesus immediately refers to time and says, "The time has come." It's like Lincoln, "Now, now, now!" Not an hour from now when you reset your clocks, but now! There is a sense of urgency, a time for you to make a decision.

The other part of Jesus' message there at the beginning is that it's not just time *once, way back then*, but it is time *today*. Each time that Jesus comes up to anything, He says, "Now is the time." He says it again and again and again. What time is it for you? Christianity is not a class to take. It's not an exam to pass once. It is a response to when Jesus comes up to you and says, "The time is now. Are you ready to go?"

When John the Baptist went to prison, Jesus went into Galilee. The Gospel comes when God takes the initiative. G. K. Chesterton said, "Since that day [Jesus came], it has never been quite enough to say that God is in His heaven and all is right with the world, since the rumor that God had left His heavens to set it right." Jesus came proclaiming the Gospel (which is just another way of saying *good news*). I want to help you remember this. I'm not like Lincoln or Martin Luther King or certainly not like Jesus, but I want to help you remember the simple message of Jesus we've already started.

Hold up your hand, this is easy. The first thing is the first finger. The **time has come**. The time is now. Now is the time to learn what the Gospel is about. Move to the second finger. The **Kingdom is at hand**. When Jesus says "the Kingdom of God has come near," that means the King is coming. That is the good news.

We spent some time last year with the Jesus Creed. Scot McKnight said like navigators need the North Star, like hikers need a compass, followers of Jesus need a pointer. The pointer that Jesus uses is the Kingdom. Over and over it will say, "The Kingdom is the place where King Jesus changes life." The people who are committed to the Kingdom form a society. We call that society *church* but it is just an outpost of the Kingdom. That can mean only one thing. Jesus expects the people who follow Him to live in the Kingdom in their daily lives. Not at church, in their daily lives, *right now*. The Kingdom is among you. The **time has come**. The **Kingdom is at hand**. That's the good news. When Jesus gives the same speech in the Gospel of Luke, he says,

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight

for the blind, to set the oppressed free, **19** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." [Luke 4:18-19]

It is good news because before the Kingdom comes, there is bad news. This is one of the reasons it is hard in the United States of America to talk about the Gospel being good news because in some ways, we're *living* with pretty good news. Compared with what's happening in Somalia or the Sudan or the West Bank or anywhere else in the world, our lives are filled with good news. Jesus said, "I come to bring a Kingdom that is *real* good news and before the Kingdom comes, it's bad news because the world is broken." Jesus says, "I come to find the lost." That means people are lost. He says, "It is the sick who need a doctor." That means people are sick even when they don't know it. Jesus says, "I come that sinners would find grace," and the righteous don't like to hear that.

What's the good news for you? Some of that is going to make your reaction to Jesus very revealing. Jesus says, "The time has come. The Kingdom is at hand." The King is coming, not as our little baby Jesus in the manger, not as Our Savior, but as the King, *your* King. That changes everything. Anybody read *The Chronicles of Narnia* or at least seen the movie? Those children's books are so fabulous. Aslan, the lion, is the Jesus figure in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. It starts off this way.

And now a very curious thing happened. None of the children knew who Aslan was any more than you do, but the moment the Beaver had spoken . . . the name of Aslan each one of the children felt something jump in its inside. Edmund [the traitor] felt a sensation of mysterious horror. Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or beginning of summer.

When we hear the name of King Jesus, it changes our world. I love Garrison Keillor. Last month some time, he finished his very Lutheran hour of talk by saying, "We're going to sing a very un-Lutheran song. I want to sing an old Baptist song. Why would I sing an old Baptist song? Because 104-year-old George Beverly Shea just went to heaven." Keillor said, "He didn't hear no Lutheran song when he got to heaven. He heard a Baptist song that might have been something like this."

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus;
There's just something about that name!
Kings and kingdoms will all pass away,
But there's something about that name!

When you hear the name Jesus, what do you do when it stirs something in your heart? You think, "I want to be part of that. I want to be on His side. I want to be in that Kingdom." The **time has come**. The **Kingdom is at hand**. How do you get in? You **repent**. Now, repentance gets a bad word in our lives because we think it means "I'm sorry. I'll never do that again. I'm sorry You caught me. I'll try harder next time." Repentance is not "I'm sorry. I'll try harder." Repentance is "I'm broken. Please help me," and Jesus is saying, "The reason I call it good news is because you are broken, every one of you." Every one of us is broken to the core. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn says the problem with evil is not that it's out there. The problem with evil is that it

runs through the center of the human heart. I'm broken and so are you and Jesus says, "I have come not to fix you, I have come to save you."

We have four or five places in this building, they keep springing up and changing shape, but places where every single week people come and say, "I am a broken human being and I am lost and cannot fix myself." Whether it's Al-Anon or Overeaters Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous or some type of drug anonymous, it starts with repenting. For them repenting is saying, "We admitted we were powerless over the power of alcohol, over the power of drugs, over the power of success, over the power of money or gambling or work or approval or our children's happiness. We admitted we were powerless and that our lives had become unmanageable." *That's* repentance. "We admitted that only a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." Broken people admit that they are not in their right minds, and they receive then and only then, the gift of grace. Not "I'll try harder." Not "I can get this right" but "I'm broken. God help me." And God comes and not only helps us, He forgives us.

The **time has come**. The **Kingdom is at hand**. It's good news if we **repent** and **believe the good news**. Believing, then, is a lot different from taking notes, knowing the answers for the test. I'm all for learning new facts about Jesus. I think that's important, but believing means that I will embrace the story. I will come to believe *in* the story so that I get *into* the story. We embrace the story of Jesus so that it comes alive in us again and again and again and it changes us because we are not the same person we were the first time we heard the story. It's as old as the Protestant Reformation and older.

Martin Luther had a friend, a colleague named Philipp Melanchthon, who asked if Luther would hear his confession, one brother confessing to another. Luther says sure and Melanchthon says, "I struggle with this sin." They prayed for forgiveness and Melanchthon came back the next month and among other things confesses the same sin again. "I can't seem to stop this." The third month he comes again and in his frustration says, "I can't seem to stop this. Pray for my forgiveness." Melanchthon comes back the fourth month and says, "I have done it again. God knows, nothing seems to help." Luther said, "Philipp, the Gospel is about Jesus. It's not about you. You don't fight sin by wrestling with the devil. You fight sin by turning to the Savior." That's what we believe. We don't fight sin by trying to suck it up and trying to do it better but by turning to the Savior and saying, "God, help me." Jesus says, "Come to Me, you who are weary. Come to Me, you who are tired of trying harder, pretending. Come to Me and I will give you rest."

Watching the baptisms of the children reminded me of the day not too long ago when a man and his wife came here and presented their daughter to be baptized. And when she was baptized, the dad knelt and was baptized as well. He said, "I thank God for grace." He had told me in my study, "I thank God I can admit to you and to my wife the terrible things that I have done and believe that God has forgiven me." He said to me, "John, I want to be baptized because I don't want to be that man any more. How can I change?" And I told him, the **time has come**, the **Kingdom is at hand**, **repent**, admit that you are broken, **believe the good news**. It's good news because you don't have to stay like you are, because it ends, not with four fingers of four points, but with a fifth. Jesus says, "The time has come. The Kingdom is at hand. Repent and believe."

But He doesn't stop there. It says He walked up to the beach and turned to some guys and said, "Come, follow Me." **Follow Me** shows the direction of our repentance. The key to the Gospel of

Jesus is not what you hear with your ears. It's who you follow. It's who becomes your King, because that changes everything. People who follow Jesus kneel here and get forgiven and then very slowly, they start to follow Jesus and that changes everything. John Ortberg quoted N. T. Wright:

People who listened to him at the time said things like, "We've never heard anyone talking like this", and they didn't just mean his tone of voice or his skillful public speaking.

Ortberg said they did not mean sermon illustrations. They did not mean His visuals or His use of humor. He said,

Something about Jesus keeps prodding people to do what they would rather not: Francis of Assisi gives up his possessions, Augustine gives up his mistress, John Newton gives up his slave trade, and Father Damien gives up his health [in Hawaii to touch lepers].

He inspires Leo Tolstoy, who in turn inspires Mohandas Gandhi, who inspires Martin Luther King Jr. He inspires Desmond Tutu to dream up and pray up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission [that saves all of South Africa].

Jesus teaches to change lives, theirs and mine and yours. That's the Gospel we want to get inside of this Lent. William Barclay says, "Jesus Christ did not say, 'I have a theological system which I would like you to consider. I have some theories which I would like you to ponder. I have an ethical system I would like you to obey.' No, the Gospel begins with Jesus Christ saying, 'Come and follow, walk with Me.'" And all will be well. Let's pray.

Lord God, some of us have heard this story so often that it is not news at all so it can't be *good* news. Some of us heard it today like it's the first time. They didn't realize they don't have to be good enough. They're not, but for God's sake, for Your sake, God, I pray that the time would be now, this morning, this hour, this time, and You would once again come to us. We cannot find You. You come to us. You say, "The Kingdom is here. Admit your brokenness and ask for My help. Believe in Me and follow Me." This is the only message we have, Lord Jesus. These are the only words that will save us. Convince us of that, heart and mind, body and soul. Comfort us with truth that will heal us. Most of all, teach us, Lord Jesus, to follow You, to follow You when You call, softly and tenderly. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.