

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us.

Paul Berge begins his commentary on our gospel reading from Mark describing the action in Mark as dramatic. Mark is the shortest of the gospels, after all - and it never seems to waste time talking about extraneous events and, well, some less important events as well. In other words, Mark is concise and fast paced. And I suspect that in today's gospel reading, the word "**immediately**" catches our hearts which is another thing about the Gospel of Mark, especially early Mark that almost all of the commentaries spoke to was Mark's use of that word "immediately." The New Revised Standard Version has immediately appearing sixty times in the New Testament. The Greek word used fifty-nine of those times is euthys. Fifty-eight of **those** times appear in the gospels and Acts. And of those, forty-one or roughly seventy-one percent are in Mark.

Before I pursue our Markan text further I would first like to comment on our text from Jonah. The book of Jonah records the story of God asking Jonah to carry God's message to Nineveh. Simply stated, Jonah did not want to because, well, Jonah did not trust God to do what God said God was going to do and Jonah would end up with egg on his face, you know, appearing the fool. Jonah tried going elsewhere but that did not work. A whale later, pun intended, Jonah arrived in Nineveh and delivered God's message: "Forty days more, and Nineveh will be overthrown." That eight word sentence in English requires only five words in Hebrew. And, I bet you wish my homilies were that short.

Kathryn Schifferdecker in her comments on our Jonah reading had this to say: "The response is electric. **Immediately**, the people of Nineveh believe God ... and bellow out their repentance to God, and God changes God's mind about the punishment, and does not bring it about."

In 1968, I was called to ministry. In 1969 and again in 1976, I entered college with the intent of going immediately onto seminary after graduation from college. Both times, something in life got in the way. Usually - I think God was still working on preparing me for ministry, but other times, I wonder if I was just being Jonah. In 2015, I finally did succeed in entering seminary and completing it and then being ordained in 2018. I feel like I am finally doing what God called me to do in 1968. It was a whale of ride to get to this point in my life.

So, let us return to Mark's story about Jesus. Since there is no nativity story in Mark, we enter "**immediately**" into the ministry phase of Jesus' life. First there is Jesus' baptism by John followed by John's arrest, or more correctly from the Greek, John being "delivered up." By the way, the Greek word and phrasing used about John is the same words and phrasing used often throughout Mark about Jesus being "delivered up" to crucifixion. This is then followed by another translation of Greek that is less than ideal. Our reading today says; "**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.'**" In this verse, the Greek word translated as proclaiming is the same word later translated as saying. For the record, saying is just not the same as proclaiming. Proclaiming comes with a certain level of panache, with power. Jesus proclaims that God's time is not only near, but is here. I know that a lot of Christians pine for God's kingdom to come but what if they and us lived and acted like God's kingdom is, in fact, already here, now. Would that knowledge, that thought cause all of us to act differently, to treat others differently? I think so.

Jesus' call of engagement in God's rule is present in two imperatives. The first – "to repent" – calls us to turn around, to change our mindset from ourselves, from earthly things to discipleship. The second – "to believe" – is a call to a continuing response and obedience.

Now, think about the response of the disciples in our reading today. Karoline Lewis in her commentary zeroed in on the fact that these men, these soon to be disciples, **immediately** left their nets and followed Jesus. Why? Did they just see something in Jesus? Or was immediate just Mark's theme? Or just maybe, immediately is less about marking time and more about describing action. Immediately does not only designate a when but a what. Not only a place in time, but also an event that changes the meaning of life.

This is the season of the Time after Epiphany. Epiphanies just happen, God's, Jesus', and ours. No preparation. No time to pack. No time to make arrangements. Epiphanies, especially of the divine nature, demand an immediate response. There is no invitation for contemplation or reflection but instantaneous commitment and risk. Have you had epiphanous moments? Can you name them? If so, you might be getting close to articulating what happened with the disciples in Mark.

Some think Martin Luther's explanation in the Small Catechism to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed says it clearly: "*I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church day after day he fully forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the last day he will raise me and all the dead and give me and all believers in Christ eternal life. **This** is most certainly true.*"

Hear then the good news:

Epiphany is when your life is changed forever.

Epiphany celebrates, in part, that God was also forever changed.

If the heavens are ripped apart, well then, get ready for a wild ride.

This, you know, can be both freeing and terrifying.

Free to respond in the moment.

Terrified of what beyond the moment will unfold.

The Contemplative Monk says: "When someone is broken, don't try to fix them. (You can't.) When someone is hurting, don't attempt to take away their pain. (You can't.) Instead, love them by walking beside them in the hurt. (You can.) Because sometimes what people need is simply to know they aren't alone."

Jesus said that this way: "**Love one another as you love yourself.**"

Grace and peace to you my friends. The kingdom of God is not just near, not just yet to come, the kingdom of God is here. You as a child of God, are not only an heir to that Kingdom but living in it now.

**Amen**