

The Time is Now

Mark 1:14-18

November 2, 2014

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Amen and amen. The love of Jesus is deeper than we can ever imagine. We turn this morning to hear the invitation of Jesus himself to the kingdom. This week we're in the Book of Mark, but let me explain, there's a twofold reason why we're in the Book of Mark chapter one. I will return to the Book of Acts next week, but the reason is this: last week we were together looking at Acts chapter 11 where we see the newly converted Christians who are both Jewish and Greek in the city of Antioch, and it is there, as the grace of God was abounding, as their lives were being transformed, as they were declaring the person and work of Jesus Christ, the gospel itself—they were changing and their neighborhoods were changing. Their lives were changing. And that was evidence of grace in their lives. It was at that place that they were first called Christian. And if you were here last week, the thing that I said was, to be called Christian—which was a name that came from the outside, this was not a self-designation—it meant that they began and they lived their lives and the goal of their lives was Jesus. And anything else added on doesn't belong—though it may be important, it is not Jesus. And so this week I wanted to go a little bit deeper into what it means, then, to be a Christian. What does it mean to begin to live and to end with Jesus Christ? And so we turn to the words of Jesus.

The second reason is born out of the fact—and I will do so throughout this sermon—share with you the ways in which God is working in my life. The things that he is showing me. Last week we served as a host church to the Navigators within the region and through 3-D Movements, which is an organization working with the Navigators to work alongside churches to equip them to the ministry of discipleship. And so we spent a great deal of time talking about these things, and in and through these verses, God was speaking mightily to me. And so I wanted to share that with you, recognizing that it is a bit of a risk, but I am not the focus of what I'm going to say here. But I want to share with you what God is teaching me. With that in mind, we turn to Mark chapter one, verses fourteen to eighteen.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me this morning?

Heavenly Father, I pray now that by the power of your Holy Spirit, through the words of Jesus recorded for us in Scripture, that you would speak to us in this moment, in this time, drawing us to yourself but not leaving us the same. We thank you, Lord, for this morning. Help the teacher. In Jesus' name. Amen.

So, in these verses you'll see in your outline I've given you there—we'll see three things: there is a definitive moment, and that word you see there is a transliteration of the Greek word, translated "time." It is the word *kairos*. And it was a definitive moment, a definitive time that Jesus came and he announced what he did in this chapter of Mark. Secondly, there are these two imperatives: repent and believe. And in

these three points in this passage, we will see the invitation of Jesus. But also, the challenge. We can never have just one or the other; we might want just the invitation but not the challenge, and some are more desiring of the challenge but forget the fact that it is only by the invitation of our gracious Lord that we participate. But I want you to see all three.

And we begin this morning, then, in these first two verses, fourteen and fifteen, of this definitive moment talking about a precise time and space. It says, "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God." This is the good news—literally speaking—the good news of God. We don't know all the details there; Mark sums it up for us. Mark is the fastest-paced gospel of the four. Here he does not break out all the details, but we know from the other gospels that Jesus was teaching what he was coming to do: the good news of God. And then he says, "The time is fulfilled." The *kairos* moment—this moment is the fulfillment of the promise. And what I want you to see in this first, definitive moment, this *kairos* moment, is this: this is an unambiguous act of Jesus in that he is saying, right now, in this moment, he's beginning to preach and in this part of his public ministry as he launches it, though he's around age thirty-three, he is saying, "The kingdom of God is at hand." And when he says these things, he's saying, "Right now, God is speaking." More than that. God is not just speaking a set of propositions or ideas; God is and has—as I stated last week and I'll echo it again—he has moved into the zip code. He's come in and he's been made incarnate. God has tabernacled. God has taken up residence. God is not just infinite, he's imminent. And Jesus is demonstrating that God is saying, "I am his Son." He has moved in.

This is unambiguous, and he is then saying, "Come." He's inviting, and that's the second part of this definitive moment, this announcement of the gospel of God, which itself is a heralding of good news. He then says, "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand." So not only is this definitive moment an unambiguous act of Jesus saying, "Hey, God is speaking and he's speaking in the flesh. God has moved into the neighborhood"—he then says, "The kingdom of God is fulfilled." The *kingdom* of God. That is used in parallel with the gospel of God. This is not, again, just a bare set of ideas or propositions or doctrines. He's saying, "I have come into the world to speak the good news." And when he says "the kingdom of God is fulfilled" he's saying this: that Jesus is both ruler and reigning in this new kingdom. And when he is announcing it, that the kingdom of God is fulfilled, he is inviting you and me into that kingdom. But again, it's not abstract. He's inviting us into relationship, for the gospel is that God made himself flesh and blood, that God so loved the world that he gave, and so he gave his Son. His Son is the king, the ruler, and the one who is reigning, and he's inviting us.

But the question is, so that we don't miss something, what does that tangibly mean? What does it look like? What does the definitive *kairos* moment in time look like? It looks like what we see just a few verses later, in verse forty. If you have your Bibles, please turn there. If you don't, I'll read the brief passage. It is just three verses.

And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

All of that is everything that I just said in a moment in time in this man's life. First, it is the unambiguous act of Jesus announcing that the good news is not just abstract principles—it is that God has come into the world to do something, and therefore, Jesus, as both ruler and the one who reigns in this kingdom, is inviting this man into the kingdom. Because that kingdom turns the kingdom of the world upside down and inside out. What do I mean? It's because this man, who suffered from leprosy, was considered by all who were around him as unclean. And in that kingdom, in that world's thinking, those who were unclean made clean things and clean people unclean. So no one touched him. No one cared for him. No one would get near him, because the unclean made the clean unclean. Jesus, as an

unambiguous act that God has moved to the neighborhood, announces the gospel and the kingdom not as abstract principles but as a relationship, and invites this man. And this man comes—notice, it is not how we often speak about responding. I don't know if you've ever used the phrase—I know I have—where we say, "Invite Jesus into your heart." That phrase is never used in Scripture. What I want you to see is who's doing the inviting. God is. Jesus is the one doing the inviting. The man simply comes in his weakness, in his uncleanness, and he begs. He says, "If you are willing—if you, Jesus, are willing—make me clean." And watch what happens; the world is turned upside down. Finally, for the first time in anyone's history or knowledge, a clean thing made an unclean thing clean. That is what it looks like to recognize the ruling reign of the kingdom of Jesus, of God who's moved in to this moment and this time and this space. Finally, Jesus—as the Son of the living God, the only clean human being who took on flesh ever to walk the face of the planet—is now coming in and is saying, "I am clean; I will make you clean." And he would do this unambiguously through the cross. You see, Jesus, to make us clean, didn't just dismiss the holiness of God. He didn't just ignore our sin, our uncleanness. Rather, Jesus took on our sin. He took on our uncleanness. He satisfies the holiness of God, satisfies the justice of God, and he doesn't ignore our sin, he takes it on—which enables Paul to say, "He became sin that we might become the righteousness of God." The clean has made the unclean clean.

What does that look like for us? I want to say to you and argue to you that this moment, surely as I'm announcing this Word—which is not my word, but it is the Word of the living God—that this moment, this morning, this minute, this hour is a *kairos* moment where Jesus is saying through these verses, these words, something he wants you to hear. Let me ask it this way: in the last week, the last two weeks, have you experienced, existentially, anger, anxiety, restlessness, a sleeplessness? Because there's something eating you up inside? I maintain to you that that precisely could be a moment in time when, as you're experiencing that anger, that anxiety, that difficulty, that trial—whatever it may be—it may be that moment precisely that God intends there to be an open door for you to enter into the kingdom and the rule and reign of Jesus and bring it to him. It was in this man's life—his leprosy was not just a side point. It was not a coincidence. It was this man's uncleanness. No one would touch him until this moment, and he says, "Are you willing?" And I ask you: are you willing this morning to come with whatever God is teaching you in your anger, in your business, in your avoidance or ability to try to escape things—whatever may be going on—are you willing to bring it? Because Jesus is willing to receive it.

It doesn't matter if you are a Christian or not; the invitation is to all of us. The invitation to the Christian is—as long as you walk with Jesus—the invitation is not a past thing; it's a constant, daily thing. How do I know that? This is what God is teaching me. At the end of last week, my *kairos* moment happened. Just as we were beginning this great seminar on discipleship, I became acutely aware of how much I believe I have failed, as both a husband and a father, in spiritually leading in my home. I felt that powerfully. And, see, I had wrestled with this. I'm an idea person—maybe I've never been diagnosed with ADD, but I constantly have ideas popping off in my head; even while I preach, I have to suppress ideas. It's just who God made me. But my problem isn't ideas. I have a lot of ideas, but what I end up doing is I have maybe some thoughts about how to employ that. But here's what I do—I'll go, "Well maybe tomorrow. Maybe next weekend. Maybe next week." And yet I was wearing and feeling—not because anyone put it on me, but because as I was reading this passage—I was asking, "What is this moment? What am I learning, right in the midst of this seminar, about discipleship? Do I know how to even disciple my daughter?" And I felt a keen sense of inadequacy, and I think that's a gift. God was inviting me. Am I willing to bring that inadequacy, that failure, that sense of burden that I'm wearing on my shoulders and on my heart—am I willing to bring it to the only one who can take my sin and make me clean?

And so I say to you, as I share with you my own life: I'm not calling you to do something that Jesus hasn't already called me to do. But I know this: that since that moment, I began the process of asking, "What are you teaching me? What are you inviting me to do, Lord?" And there began the process of

hearing this word in my life. The king, the ruler, Jesus, was inviting me to bring it. As I say to you, and ask you, what are these verses and what is Jesus saying to you? What is he inviting you to bring? If you're living and breathing, there's something. I'll leave that to the Lord, but the invitation is there. Here's the beauty: he knows it all already. In fact, he desires for this to be a divine appointment—an intersection between his incredible, beautiful, powerful grace to meet wherever it is that you are. So let's go further.

If all Jesus did was invite us, but never challenge us, then that makes his grace cheap. Nor can we have just challenge without grace. There are both. Jesus' grace is extravagant, as Barbara Dogood writes in her book *Extravagant Grace*, but it is a grace that will never leave us the same. So let's look at the challenge. The challenge he gives there is not just that the kingdom of God is at hand—he then says these two imperatives: repent and believe. What does he mean? He means this: are you willing to come into the kingdom? To come into the kingdom means that repentance needs to take place, that repentance in the kingdom of Jesus Christ is a part of the culture of that kingdom. Because we all come in inadequate. We come in by his cross, not ours, and yet he invites us into that kingdom. And to do so means repentance. So when he says “repent”, I think there are three things.

First, we need to observe. Make an observation. What is God speaking to you, as I said, in these verses? But specifically, as you are experiencing anger, pride, fear, defensiveness, trying to escape, trying to cover up, lust, lying, theft—these are not things that are out there. As you are experiencing these things and a whole host of others that I could name, what is it that he is calling you to do? Observe it. Look at it.

And then ask the second question through the process of reflection: how is this thing, this area of my life, this pattern—how is it shaping my life? How is it keeping me from relationship? How is it hurting relationships? How is it affecting my work life? Whatever it may be, beyond observation needs to be reflection. This pattern is not happening outside of my life; it's happening intricately within the different communities that I'm involved in. Your nuclear group of friends or family, whatever the case may be, in your neighborhood, in your work, in your play—whatever it may be, these things have an effect.

The process of repentance is not only observe, not only reflect, but it's a third, and that is the process of what you've heard: repent means to turn from and to turn to, Biblically speaking. Now I'm going to use a different word. I'm going to use the word “discuss.” Here's what I mean. The process of repentance means to turn from and to turn to—that is to turn to the Lord your God and begin talking with your Lord about the area that you're being called to repentance in. Are you talking with God about the area where he may be calling you to repentance?

But there is another way that it also needs to take place: find someone else in the journey with you. If you don't have that person, pray for someone. Talk to someone, if you're a part of this body, if you're a regular attendee, if you're a visitor. We would love to direct you to someone who can talk with you, because as we confess to God, we are also called by the Scriptures to confess our sins to one another. We need others along in the journey with us, because no one becomes a Christian through Jesus Christ as an individual who remains an individual. You are called into a body of people. The process of repentance is observing: what is this doing in my life? What is it doing to my relationships? How is it shaping? And I reflect on that reality. And I then need to begin the process of discussing it with my Lord and my Savior, asking him for forgiveness. But also talking with someone else who's in my life.

So, see, here's what God is doing in me. As I began to experience this thing that God was showing me in regard to being the spiritual leader of my home and discipling my daughter, I did begin the process of discussing it. I began discussing it with my friend Peter Floyd, who's giving me good advice. I began the process of sort of discussing it with God—I'm just gonna put my heart out—*sort of* discussing it. I knew that there were things I needed to be doing. And again, I have a lot of ideas, and I might put them into play

for a day or so but then I feel frustrated that I've failed to do it. So then I stop talking to God about because I feel bad about it. You see, I'm not coming into the kingdom, I'm not hearing the invitation.

But then there was another key part of that discussion—I need to talk about it with my wife. I didn't do that. And so, last Sunday I came here, and I shared with you: is my life something worth imitating? And then I said: is my family something some other family might want to imitate? And then I said no, and what I realized as my wife shared with me was that I dragged her in and I hurt her in that process. I left you with the impression that perhaps my wife or my daughter had failed, when that was not what I was trying to communicate. But see, there in that moment, God was teaching me that I needed to repent. I needed to ask forgiveness of my wife whom I hurt. Now, husbands, I say to you: is there anything more difficult—and I say this boldly—than having your spiritual pants down by your ankles with your wife? She knows you better than any other person on the planet. Is there any more difficult of a person to confess to? In fact, I'll maintain, sometimes it's easier to confess to the Lord than to the person whom we share a bedroom with. But that was a moment for me.

And what I saw in that moment wasn't just that I need to be careful what I say from the pulpit—that's just behavior modification. There was something else, deeper. That deeper thing is—when God is teaching me something, it's like I'm electric. My hair is on end. I'm ready to share it. But sometimes I share things before they're fully baked, and when I do that, I hurt others. I need to spend a little more time allowing that to bake with my Lord, in reflection and observation and discussion with my Heavenly Father. These are the things that God is teaching me. There are many things about which this week I have been in the process of repenting of. What might be he calling you to repent of this morning?

But the final imperative is *believe*. Repent and believe. To believe isn't what so often we make it in the western world. When we think of belief, we think of intellectual hoops that we have to jump through. But when we say we believe something, we are actually talking about action—not just intellectual reflection. Belief is to be called into action. So here it is to turn from sin to the Lord, confessing but also believing. When he says repent and believe in the gospel, he's saying to act out, then, the gospel. What does that look like? It looks like this, I think: it's to begin the process of planning. What do I mean by planning? It's this: there's something you need to stop doing and something you need to start doing. To believe in the gospel means I stop making excuses for myself and I start taking responsibility for my actions. I stop allowing the smartphones and all the noise in our lives to have rule and reign, and I start allowing the Lord to have more rule and reign over my time and my mental reflection and my heart space. I stop going to that website, and start by talking with someone who can keep you accountable so that you won't go there. But even that is not foolproof, is it?

Believing in the gospel means this: there is something today, *today*, that you can act on. That's the second part of belief; one it's to plan, something you stop doing and then you start doing, but then today you can act on something. And that is this: we Americans are really good at building up these great plans. We think weeks in advance, months at a time—what are your resolutions for the year? But I'm wondering, because today is the day that the Lord has made, maybe there is something I just need to stop worrying about in tomorrow or these week or this month or this year, and start saying, "Is there something I need to stop doing and start doing today?" Is there someone I need to seek out to walk this journey with me? Is there someone who can show me what it means to hear from Jesus through the Scriptures? What is God asking you to believe in and to act on today?

I want to be very clear: at every stage of this, from the invitation into the kingdom at the defining moment of this hour, this day, and through the repent and belief—it all begins, is empowered by, and ends with grace. We cannot enter the kingdom without grace. We cannot repent and believe in the kingdom without grace. It is his grace that invites us, his grace that empowers us, his grace that goes with

us. It is by grace alone. This same Lord invites us to drink deeply of that grace. I want to share with you this closing quote from Robert Farrar Capon, who passed away last year, who was writing and reflecting on the doctrines of grace that came from the Reformation. He wrote this on October 31st on what is sometimes known as Reformation Day. October 31st, 1517—Luther would nail the ninety-five theses on the church door at Wittenberg, where he was hoping to bring reformation to the Catholic church but a whole different thing happened. But underneath it all were the doctrines of grace that he was learning from the Scriptures. Capon writes this and reflects on it, he says this:

The Reformation was a time when men went blind, staggering drunk because they had discovered, in the dusty basement of late medievalism, a whole cellar full of fifteen-hundred-year-old, two-hundred proof Grace—bottle after bottle of pure distillate of Scripture, one sip of which would convince anyone that God saves us single-handedly. The word of the Gospel—after all those centuries of trying to lift yourself into heaven by worrying about the perfection of your bootstraps—suddenly turned out to be a flat announcement that the saved were home before they started. Grace has to be drunk straight: no water, no ice, and certainly no ginger ale; neither goodness, nor badness, not the flowers that bloom in the spring of super spirituality could be allowed to enter into the case.

He is saying that no amount of our goodness, no amount of our badness, could ever merit—before a holy God—grace. No amount of super-spirituality or great plans could ever earn for us an ounce or a drop of the blood of Jesus, because it is all, two-hundred proof, pure, gratuitous grace. And it is Jesus who, this moment, this second, invites us in. But he will never leave us as we came in. He calls us and he also challenges us. This is what the Lord is doing in my life. What is he doing in yours? Let's pray.

Come, Lord Jesus. Come and make your Word by your Spirit real to us, and speak to our hearts and our minds, inviting us to participate in the gospel of God, the kingdom of God. Lord, we pray that you would enable us, by your invitation, to drink deeply of this wonderful grace that makes us new. Lord, we are all works in progress, but we know that you have a plan, a time, a moment for us. So, Lord, speak, for we are listening. And help the teacher. In Jesus' name. Amen.