

Mark 1:14-20 Year B Epiphany 3

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Amen

Ecclesiastes 3 starts by saying “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven”. Almost everything we do revolves around time, when we do things, how long we do them for, or even how often they are done. Many of you will know that I am a teacher, and in schools our lives revolve around timetables and meetings and when the bell rings it is amazing to watch about 800 people all getting up and moving, from being settled in one room to being settled in another, all in the space of just a few minutes. Due to the development of increasingly sophisticated time keeping devices, time itself has been divided into smaller and smaller parcels, and schools are just one example of how it is possible to cram a lot of activities for a lot of people into a small portion of time.

Ancient methods of telling the time involved using sand, water and even candles to determine how much time had passed. These were nowhere near as accurate as our clocks and watches, but do tell us that the timing of events was just as important to people living thousands of years ago, as it is today. The first chapter of the Gospel of Mark tells us the circumstances and setting for the beginning of Jesus’s ministry to the people of Galilee. Mark tells us how events fit together timewise from Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan by John, then being tempted in the wilderness by the devil and after John had been arrested and could no longer be heard in public, Jesus came to Galilee and began to spread the Word himself.

Mark is clear about what Jesus actually said. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;^[k] repent, and believe in the good news.” During the recent Christmas services we heard from Isaiah as he prophesied about the coming Messiah, saying

“For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷ His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.”¹

When Jesus said the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near, he is saying to the Jewish people, and everyone since then, that what was predicted earlier by Isaiah, had now come true and the kingdom of God had come to earth, or in other words, the promised and much anticipated Messiah had arrived!

He didn't come as the Jewish people expected their king to arrive, with great pomp and ceremony, but he came as a baby into a humble carpenter's family. When the time came for him to start his ministry after John the Baptist's imprisonment, he began to teach the people of Galilee about the kingdom of God and tried to describe what it is like to the many people that gathered to listen to him. In Matthew's gospel there are many of these descriptions of what the kingdom of God is like. Some of these are: the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, or a treasure hidden in a field, or a fishing net cast into the sea or a merchant in search of fine pearls just to name a few of the examples that have been given to us. We get a sense that the kingdom of God is something very valuable, something that is not immediately obvious and may need to be searched for, and something that is capable of great growth. Today, financial advisors dream of finding something like this that will satisfy their clients investment criteria, (That is something of value, not obvious and capable of growth.) But of course, Jesus wasn't talking about

¹ Isaiah 9: 6,7

financial security at all, he was talking about a completely different type of security. He was telling people about a loving God, one that He called Father, and He was promoting a new way of living, thinking and interacting with one another based on grace.

As Jesus travelled around teaching, He chose His disciples from those He encountered along the way. Today's gospel tells us how He told four fishermen to follow Him. He used language that was clearly understood by them, and they literally dropped everything and followed him, in what turned out to be life changing moments for them. Before this, they must have seen or heard about him as He travelled around Galilee talking to crowds and they wasted no time at all in leaving their families and livelihood to become His disciples. Like carpenters, fishermen were used to working with their hands, they were a part of the working masses that kept Galilee and the surrounding areas supplied with necessities. They were used to working in rough conditions and were loyal to their friends. They were well connected, not in the sense of wealth, but in the way that they could identify with the majority of the population. When Jesus chose Andrew, Peter, James and John, He selected people who would be listened to, people who would still be around to spread the good news when the time came, and He was no longer around, and people who had the capacity to become influential in the development of the church in the future.

Initially they would have spoken of Jesus and His good news to the people in their communities, and this helped to spread the news even further. Most would agree that it is much easier to hear and understand something that is told to you by someone similar in outlook to yourself, or even better a friend or family member. When Jesus and the apostles moved from place-to-place speaking to gatherings of people, they would often share meals with those they met along the way and talk about the kingdom of God around or across the dining room table which was, and still is, a great place for

discussions and explanations of many things. It is often these casual conversations that can be most fruitful in explaining our faith, but to put it into language similar to today's gospel, these casual conversations are the baited fishing lines that we extend to others in the hope that they will become hooked on the message. And like dedicated fishing folk, if the bait isn't taken the first time, or the second, then we will be resilient, and determinedly keep on baiting the hook and extending the line, possibly through a few storms, no matter how long it takes, until we become successful fishers of people.

Jesus' messages to the Galileans are just as important today as they were by the lake two thousand years ago. When the kingdom of God comes near and we allow it to enter our hearts, then we are like the fish that have been caught in the fishing net of His great love. He has a purpose and a plan for each of us and in time they will be fulfilled, however, like Jesus it is much better for us when these purposes and plans are shared with those around us.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.

Amen