

The Third Sunday in the Year of Mark

The phone goes, or it could be a text message or even an email. Suddenly and unexpectedly you received a piece of news that changes your morning, perhaps your day, even perhaps your whole life. Without warning some event, over which you had no control, reorders your life and changes the way you spend your time. The plans you had have to be completely revised. Life will never be the same again.

So, why am I talking about time? Because the first thing that Jesus says to us in Mark's Gospel is about time. "The time has come", he says or, in other translations, "The time is fulfilled". Why should Jesus begin his ministry talking about time? Clearly because Jesus' appearance in this world is an important moment; he was going to change human lives for the better. But there is more to it. At Easter, when we bless the Paschal Candle, the priest carves two Greek letters into the wax. They are Alpha and Omega, the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet, and we proclaim Jesus to be the "Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end because all time belongs to Him." That is the point I am trying to make. As soon as Jesus appeared in Galilee, there was a new kind of time that changed everything. Yes, life continued the same, yes people went fishing and had babies and fell in love. But now those who had believed in Jesus experienced a new kind of time, everything was reordered and their pattern of living would never be the same again. Paul talks about time as well. He says that time is growing short. In other words, the time measured by clocks and watches and the movement of the sun and stars is giving way to a new kind of time which is God's time, a time which offers a new picture of creation and life; a time which places the business of being human into a new experience of the closeness of God and his continual care for us.

Remember Jonah. He was a prophet asked by God to go and preach repentance to the City of Nineveh, a city known for its opulence, its vice and its violence. That word from God gave him a completely new experience of time because he knew that his life would change. He decided not to go instead to get on a ship and go elsewhere. The sailors threw him overboard as an offering to God to calm the sea, he was swallowed by a whale, was released, and after three days went to Nineveh and successfully carried out the Lord's instruction. Jonah was able to see that God was operating a different kind of time from that to which he was familiar and he Jonah was being drawn into it.

The same was true for Simon and Andrew, James and John, the four fishermen in the Gospel who were called by Jesus to follow him. They had a prosperous and successful fishing business. It had been established for generations. It could not go wrong and they were not looking for new opportunities but Jesus literally walked into their lives. They were to recognise that when Jesus said that the time had come, he meant that they were being invited to spend their lives, not just in the time of sun and stars and early Roman time pieces. Now everything was changed because human time was connected to God's time and God's experience which is eternal life.

Jonah, Simon and Andrew, James and John saw everything in a new way, a new time in which they could see the power of God renewing and restoring human life.

Today Jesus walks into our lives and tells us that the time has come. Yes, from the moment of hearing this word life will continue much the same as usual, but at the same time there is an opportunity to see something new. Time, life and love is now shot through and permeated with the presence and power of Jesus who is God. It means that every ordinary moment is not ordinary anymore. Each one carries the power of the Spirit renewing and recreating our lives and our world. In faith and trust we are invited to see, with the eyes of faith, our own experience of time as now part of God's time so that everything we have and are is being drawn closer and closer to God so that our humanity finds its fullness in him.

Today Jesus walks into our lives, as he did into the lives of Jonah, Simon and Andrew, James and John and says that the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Yes, from the moment of hearing this word, life will continue much the same as normal but not quite. Now we are invited to see that in everything that happens to us and in everything we do, the Spirit and power of God is working for our good and for the good of our humanity. The closeness of the Kingdom of God means that when someone annoys or irritates us, the Spirit of God is working in that relationship to bring wholeness, peace and growth to both of us. All we need do is accept the other as gift, respect them and love them. Is there any other way?

Today Jesus walks into our lives and commands us to repent. Put simply it means that each day we must see the promise that Jesus makes by being present in our lives and we must be constantly letting go of those attitudes and ways of living that close us to the new time and the Kingdom which is present to us. So when we deepen the division between ourselves and another person, when we widen the gap by selfishness, gossip and lack of forgiveness then it is time to repent.

Today Jesus walks into our lives and commands us to believe in the Good News. The Good News that God's love is translated into a real historic reality in our lives, all we need do is cooperate with it. We are at the centre of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Reconciliation with each other and with other Christians is precisely the way to manifest our belief in the Good News.

“Lord, by your spirit you move human hearts that enemies may speak to each other again, adversaries join hands, and peoples seek to meet together. By the working of your power, it comes about O Lord, that hatred is overcome by love, revenge gives way to forgiveness and discord is changed to mutual respect.”