

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Third Sunday after the Epiphany) Sunday, January 22, 2012

GOSPEL: Mark 1:14–20

Before Jesus calls his first disciples, he proclaims a message that becomes known as “the gospel” or good news from God. God is ready to rule our lives. Those who realize this will respond with repentance and faith.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news.”

¹⁶As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea — for they were fishermen. ¹⁷And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” ¹⁸And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

¹⁴Μετὰ δὲ τὸ παραδοθῆναι τὸν Ἰωάννην ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ ¹⁵καὶ λέγων ὅτι Πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς καὶ ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ: μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεῦετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ. ¹⁶Καὶ παράγων παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλιλαίας εἶδεν Σίμωνα καὶ Ἀνδρέαν τὸν ἀδελφὸν Σίμωνος ἀμφιβάλοντας ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ: ἦσαν γὰρ ἀλιεῖς. ¹⁷καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου, καὶ ποιήσω ὑμᾶς γενέσθαι ἀλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων. ¹⁸καὶ εὐθὺς ἀφέντες τὰ δίκτυα ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ. ¹⁹Καὶ προβάς ὀλίγον εἶδεν Ἰάκωβον τὸν τοῦ Ζεβεδαίου καὶ Ἰωάννην τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ, καὶ αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ καταρτίζοντας τὰ δίκτυα, ²⁰καὶ εὐθὺς ἐκάλεσεν αὐτούς. καὶ ἀφέντες τὸν πατέρα αὐτῶν Ζεβεδαῖον ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ μετὰ τῶν μισθωτῶν ἀπῆλθον ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ.

“Immediately!”

+ In nomine Domini. Amen.

If you’ve ever read through the Gospel According to Mark – front to back, beginning to end – there is one word that sticks out in a manner unforgettable. For those of us who remember Groucho Marx on Television in the 1950s when the world was “black and white” starring in his own show called “You Bet Your Life” that ran for eleven years, I could imagine the magnificent comedian and film star saying to help people win \$100 by mentioning the *secret word*, “It’s a small word, a common word, found around the house ...”

That’s true in the Greek of the New Testament, the language in which our Gospels were written way back toward the end of the 1st Century ... the word for which I am searching is quite tiny in the Greek language ... it is the word **εὐθὺς** and generally it is matched with another word to form a connecting phrase, it’s usually matched with the tinier Greek word **καὶ** so we have **καὶ εὐθὺς** and, in Mark’s Gospel this little connecting phrase is frequent and almost regular ... in only 16 chapters, it appears 33 times.

What does it mean? How is it translated?

Well, **εὐθύς** can mean many things – it can mean “at once” or “right now” or “just then” or “straight away” or “immediately.” *Immediately* is how it is translated in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, the version that we read publicly in worship and use for Bible Study.

And the other word **καὶ** means “and.”

Put the two together **καὶ εὐθύς** and you have “And immediately.” And that phrase is the *mark* of Mark’s Gospel (no pun intended). Every first year Student in Seminary reading through the first Gospel to appear in the 1st Century (around the year 70 CE) is struck by that phrase ... it repeats again and again and again.

It strikes a sense of immediacy, a sense of closeness in time and space ... it puts the Story of the Life of Jesus (which is what a Gospel is ... as Mark begins the story, “The good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God ...”) ... it puts the Story into one’s face, makes it come alive in front of the listener, brings with it a sense of urgency ... as if to say, “This Story is one to which you should listen and pay attention and heed and most importantly act upon!”

Among the many translations and emendations of the text that are around today, my favourite is that of Eugene Peterson, pastor/biblical-scholar/poet/author/teacher and now retired and living in Montana. His version is called simply *The Message* and is available from every bookstore you can imagine, and of course via the Internet.

Here is how Peterson translates our Gospel portion this morning:

14 After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee preaching the Message of God:
15 “Time’s up! God’s kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message.”

16 Passing along the beach of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew net-fishing. Fishing was their regular work. 17 Jesus said to them, “Come with me. I’ll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I’ll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass.” 18 They didn’t ask questions. They dropped their nets and followed.

19 A dozen yards or so down the beach, he saw the brothers James and John, Zebedee’s sons. They were in the boat, mending their fishnets. 20 Right off, he made the same offer. Immediately, they left their father Zebedee, the boat, and the hired hands, and followed.¹

What stands out in this story of the calling of the fisher-disciples that takes place in the very first chapter of Mark’s story, in the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry?

Yes, it’s at the front of the Gospel. Let’s review how Mark tells the story: “The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” And immediately the Prophet Isaiah is quoted about a messenger coming before the Messiah appears. And immediately that messenger does appear ... John the Baptist. And immediately² Jesus is baptized by John. And immediately Jesus is driven out into the desert for 40 days and 40 nights. And then Jesus comes into the Galilee and we discover John has been arrested and Jesus walks along the shore of the lake, the Genesaret, the Sea of Galilee, and starts calling one disciple after another, actually two at a time in our reading this morning. And immediately they drop everything and walk alongside him.

¹ THE MESSAGE. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002.

² Yes ... I’m trying to make a point here with “and immediately.”

So what stands out for you? Yes, this sense of urgency and compelling call, to be sure. But is it not also the fact that Jesus is *not* a one-man-show?

“Time’s up! God’s kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message.”³

And by the way, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the King, the Christos, is not a one-man-show? God’s kingdom is a community. There are no single players, but a family of brothers and sisters all related to each other. And what Jesus wants is for you to drop everything (like pretense and excuses and hesitation and avoidance and denial and ‘I haven’t been in church for so long’ and ‘I don’t believe in organized religion’ ((neither did Jesus by the way)) and ‘only sinners go there’ ... well ... yes ☹) drop it all, leave it ... and walk along with the other brothers and sisters, the other forgiven-inadequate-but-loved-sorrowful-but-embraced-and-welcomed human beings and come into the community where together with God we work hand-in-hand to repair creation, make peace happen in an angry world, bring food to hungry and homeless people for at least one week at the Interfaith Shelter, hand out fresh food and love from our tiny food pantry, knit and crochet prayer-shawls to wrap up the grieving and hurting, string beads together to help others speak to God and listen to God’s love, read the Story, sing the songs, share the Bread, sip the Wine, greet the stranger, include, welcome, open, come inside, there’s room at the table, have some coffee, some tea, a listening ear, find a job, visit in the hospital, pray for those in prison, play the organ, play the piano, play the harp, play the flute, ring the bells, sing the anthem, walk around the capitol with the dispossessed, carry the banner with Pride, fill the plate and the basket and the heart and the soul and the life ... always the human life in need, in want, in necessity ... and always, always, always with love.

And ... **καὶ εὐθὺς** do not hesitate, do not wait, do it now, do it ...

That is the Gospel.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

*Deo Gratias (+)
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APOSTLES CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

³ Peterson, op. cit.