

“Repent and Follow – Can’t have One without the Other” based Mark 1:14-20
Delivered on January 24, 2021 at Absecon Presbyterian Church by Drew Mangione, pastor.

I’m guessing that most, if not all of you reading this know the song, ‘Love and Marriage.’ You probably know Frank Sinatra’s version, or maybe you know Dinah Shore’s. There are a few other versions out there, including by Peggy Lee, and even some punk rock bands.

But for most people my age, you probably know this song as the theme song of the Fox sit com, ‘Married with Children.’ You know the lyrics, ‘Love and marriage, Love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage. This, I tell you brother, you can’t have one, without the other.”

The message of the song is clear – Men, to keep a woman you love, you’ll have to marry her. You can’t just go around being in love with her and expect that relationship to last. Like a horse and carriage, love pulls marriage along with it. This kind of song reinforces the traditional values of the age in the 1950s.

When it was brought forward nearly 40 years later for a sit com, it highlighted a cliché of a trapped man, who, if you’ve seen the show, is no prized catch. Yet, he seems to pity himself, as imprisoned by his marriage and by this the song teaches a different value, that love is a temporary thing, but leads to a permanent trap.

In today’s gospel reading from Mark, we hear Jesus call on the people to ‘repent.’ The beauty of Mark’s gospel is the efficiency with which the story of Jesus is written. The quality of the Greek is not great, as Mark was likely a native Aramaic speaker translating his native tongue. But the efficiency of the storyteller shows why God called him to write this gospel.

The first two lines of today’s reading are the end of Mark’s prologue and the next few are the start of Jesus’s ministry. And so, in that prologue that measures just 15 verses in our bibles, and Mark packs in a summary of his entire book. He packs allusions to volumes of Hebrew Scripture. He connects Jesus to another popular prophet of the era, John the Baptist, and he shows us the glory of Israel’s God in the Father, Son and Spirit, all of which we read in Advent and again a couple weeks ago. This prologue even includes a passage we skipped over and will return to in a few weeks for Lent, which names the primary villain of the gospel – Satan.

This prologue has all of this before Mark begins to tell us about Jesus’s ministry, with the calling of the disciples. Like the song, Love and Marriage, there is a lot packed into a relatively short text, and understanding what is there, requires understanding the bigger picture, and even the cultural expectations that are deeply embedded within the words.

I won’t break down the cultural expectations in, ‘Love & Marriage,’ but let’s be honest, this song would not be received the same today, if was released on the pop charts. Nor would people in the middle ages know what it means with this link of love and marriage. Even in the time

between Sinatra singing it in 1955, and Fox using it for their show in the late 1980s, we see how the song's interpretation changed.

But I do want to break down some of the cultural expectations in Mark's text. The first of which is this idea of Good News, which provides bookends for the prologue. The first line of Mark, which you might remember from a few weeks back, is this: *'The beginning of the good news of Jesus, the Messiah, Son of God.'* This term 'good news' would have carried some very important unspoken meanings.

First off, this 'good news' was an imperial term, and Mark was likely writing this in Rome. You see, the emperor's proclamations to Rome, which he sent throughout the empire were called 'good news,' or *'euangelion.'* These proclamations of good news came from a man who claimed to have given the world peace, and that he had done so by his sword, by conquering soldiers.

But Mark shows a second meaning, with Mark being Jewish. As an Aramaic speaker he knew that Isaiah, long before the emperors used the term, used 'good news' to describe a coming Jewish 'prince of peace.' Writing in Greek, he likely knew also that *'euangelion'* was the word used in the Greek translation of Hebrew scriptures in Isaiah's prophecy to convey good tidings.

And so, the prologue starts with the good news of Jesus, and the prologue ends with Jesus proclaiming the good news of God, because as we saw in the waters, the Son and the Father are One with the Spirit, and so, the good news of Jesus is the good news of God, and vice versa. Jesus is the incarnation, or the embodiment of God in the world, and Mark says this validates the interpretation of Isaiah 40 to 55, that seems to say Israel's God is to be embodied and destined to suffer for the sins of the people. Mark also pushes back at the empire, with the notion that Caesar is a god, because Mark says the true God has come. And the One True God comes with what is truly 'good news.'

So, with this in mind, listen now to the words of Jesus that Mark calls the 'good news of God,' when Jesus says, *'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the Good News.'* Yes, 'Repent and believe.' Once again, Mark is like a poet in his efficiency and the layers in his text. Mark takes the words of Jesus, who like Mark, also likely spoke Aramaic, and translates them to Greek, so that anyone in the empire might understand. You see, at this time, Greek was the language of the Roman empire, its common tongue.

There is a lot in there with what is meant by the 'time is fulfilled' and 'Kingdom of God coming near,' each of which deserve a sermon in themselves. But I'm going to focus on 'repent.' In Hebrew and Aramaic, the word we translate as repent means to 'to turn around,' or *'shuv,'* meaning you turn from sin toward God. But when the Hebrew bible was translated to Greek, that word became *'metanoia'* meaning 'to change mind.' We see Mark showing this in the illustration that he gives right after this proclamation and the way he will portray the disciples throughout the gospel.

What Mark shows us is that *'Jesus is passing along the Sea of Galilee,'* meaning he is on the land. Simon and Andrew are *'casting their net into the sea,'* meaning they are facing the waters when Jesus speaks and says to them, *"Follow me and I will make you fish for people."* They physically turn around and leave their nets to follow him.

Again, James and John are in the boat mending their nets, they are focused on their nets, when Jesus calls to them. They turn around and leave their father Zebedee to follow Jesus. We see immediately, these men all literally turn around and they follow Jesus. What we will see in Mark's gospel later on is a theme of portraying the disciples as dense. They don't get it. They're not that bright, but you see a long and arduous process of changing their minds, as they follow Jesus from the shore all the way to the cross.

Friends, what do you think of when you hear the word, 'repentance'? Our word comes from Latin, a word for deep sorrow and remorse, *'paenitere.'* And when you add *'re'* on it, then it becomes a word about us making ourselves feel that sorrow. We tend to think of repentance as something we do to ourselves. We *do* penance. We make amends for what we have done wrong. Doing penance and making amends are important aspects of our Christian life, but they are not repentance. This is what comes in reconciliation though. They are a fruit of repentance.

Repentance as it was in the Greek and Hebrew, is something different and Mark shows us this. *Repent and Follow, Repent and Follow, go together like a horse and carriage This I tell you sisters and brothers, you can't have one without the other.*

When we turn from what we are doing in life and turn toward Jesus, we engage in repentance in the sense of turning to the God who is pursuing us. As we grow in our understanding of God's love in our lives, and as we share this love in the world around us, now our minds are changed, and we repent again. Our repentance continues as we live into our calling in the Kingdom, in God's reign here on this earth.

We will be going through Mark's gospel throughout this year, and so, I want you to see all of Mark's gospel as a biography of Jesus linking him to the God of Israel and Hebrew scriptures. He is showing us how Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed King of Israel. He is the one foretold to rule the whole world and he takes his throne not in spite of the cross, but because of the cross. On that cross, Jesus, the Son of God, one with and equal to God the Father, dies for us lifted up on that cross.

Friends, our reading today is the start of that – in that it reveals Jesus's identity, and it shows us what it means to come and follow him. What it means to be subjects of this King. You see, Jesus is the Suffering Servant, as predicted in the prophecies of Isaiah. He is the arm of God, meaning the power of God. He is Israel's God come down in the flesh, and yet he also represents Israel, to be one with the people of God, and he suffers on our behalf, so that all the nations of

the world might know His love, and receive the gift of his salvation – a new life as citizens now and forever in a new kingdom, where heaven and earth are joined as one.

You see, Jesus is an empire where it was taught that Emperors were gods and peace came from war. In this setting where these are said to go together, Israel's God breaks through by coming into creation, fulfilling words written long before Rome was born, to show us that God is King and that peace and salvation come by repentance. Peace and salvation come by turning from the things that this world tells us are most important, and instead shows us that we are to live by a rule that love for God and neighbor is truly what is most important. This reveals the Kingdom because it changes hearts and when we stop making excuses for our mistakes, it changes our minds forever. This is the love that was on that cross.

Friends, the world says that we, as Christians, must be powerful if we are to prove our religion is true. The world says that we must receive blessings from this faith if we really belong to God. Friends, the world says that if God is real, then God must be a record keeper, requiring us to earn grace through acts of repentance, some with more value than others, for a balance sheet that decides if we get into heaven.

But the gospel of grace is that God loves you first. God already loves you, no matter where you are in life. God is calling to you every day, because the Lord Jesus says to you and I, just as he did Peter, Andrew, James and John, to turn around and come follow me. Hear my words, let your mind be changed by trusting me. Let me help you see what it is to turn the world upside down by loving God and loving neighbor. Trust in me, believe, be faithful to, have faith in my good news, is the message of Jesus.

The cross is a place of victory, but not by the powers of this world. Our victory is not seen in the things the world values, but by our love, by the things we do in response to God's love, God's goodness in us. It is seen in our lament, in our sadness that the world is not as it should be and how we use that to be part of the solution to bring joy. Our God shared in our brokenness to restore us, for us and for our salvation. God didn't need to do that, but God chooses to do that out of love.

This has been a hard year we just came out of and I want you to know that you are loved by the triune God. The Father is the source of your being and your love, and by the Son, you are called to know who you are and be changed by that love, so that by the Spirit, you might live as God intended and share God's love. This is so we all might be part of making this world more and more into the Kingdom of God, not with the peace of Rome – having power over others – but with the peace of God in a mind that is changed by love, to put that love for God and our neighbor first in our lives. Amen.

Word Search Puzzle

from WhenWeWordSearch.com (use for free distribution only)
words in a straight line left to right or top to bottom



Words in the puzzle are printed in ***bold italics***.

Mark 1: 14-20 (NRSV) Now after ***John*** was ***arrested***, 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." As Jesus ***passed*** along the Sea of ***Galilee***, he saw ***Simon*** and his brother ***Andrew casting a net*** into the ***sea***--for they were fishers. And ***Jesus*** said to them, "***Follow*** me and I will ***make*** you ***fish*** for ***people***." And immediately they ***left*** their nets and followed him. As he went a little ***farther***, he saw James ***son of Zebedee*** and his ***brother*** John, who were in their ***boat mending*** the nets. Immediately he ***called*** them; and they left their ***father*** Zebedee in the boat with the ***hired men***, and followed him.