

Year B Proper 3 2024 Mark 1 vv14 to 20

Lost in translation. That's what occurs to me as I read through Mark's story. Lost in translation. Mark's Gospel strikes people – and perhaps you've thought this – Mark's Gospel strikes people as urgent and in a rush. We constantly hear the word "immediately" as he tells us the story of Jesus. It is not an urgency of panic or alarm. It is an urgency of overwhelming joy and immense hope. It is an urgency of excitement – good excitement. This is why, "Lost in translation" comes to my mind. You probably are not experiencing such excited joy and hope that you want to jump out of your chair and shout "hallelujah!" Our English translation is far too tame and ordinary. You're more likely to be too busy questioning what's happening in the story to be excited about what's in the story. Lost in translation. Let's take a walk, together, through this story to find out what all of the excitement is about.

"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God." Why did Jesus begin his ministry right after John's abruptly ended? What is the good news of God? First of all, John the Baptist wasn't just simply "arrested" as we hear today. The Greek verb used means he was "handed over to death". It's the same word used again and again to tell us what will eventually happen to Jesus. Jesus will be handed over to death. Both men are considered prophets by the people. Both offend the powers that be. Both are handed over to die violent deaths. As soon as John disappears from public ministry, Jesus appears to begin his...and this is not a coincidence.

Mark is very deliberate in his timing. Mark is about to tell us the whole gist of Jesus' preaching. Summaries of Jesus' preaching are also found in Matthew and

Luke. In Luke, Jesus tells us that the Law and the Prophets were in effect until John came. At that point, he says, the good news of the kingdom began to be proclaimed (Luke 16:16). With the end of John's ministry comes the end of an era. Now Jesus and his gospel take center stage. Jesus' ministry is the centre of our salvation history. Jesus signals the end of one age in history and the beginning of another – the one we are in now. This is exciting because this new age is the age of God's arriving kingdom on earth as in heaven.

This is the good news that Jesus is proclaiming. And, as with Mark, Jesus' timing is not a coincidence. "The time is fulfilled," he declares. The word Jesus uses for "time" is significant. He uses the word "kairos." In Greek, there are two different words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. Chronos is clock time, calendar time, seconds turning to minutes to hours to days, to weeks, to months, to years – chronos time. Kairos, on the other hand, doesn't measure minutes, it measures moments. Kairos is the right moment, the opportune moment, the perfect moment. The world takes a breath and then there is a pause. In the moment before the world exhales, lives are changed, salvation comes. That is the kairos time Jesus fulfills. And we are in it.

We will soon hear the story of Jesus preaching in his hometown synagogue. He reads from the scroll of Isaiah and, interestingly, the part of Isaiah that comes right before the bit Jesus reads, speaks of the time – kairos – when God will bring about the restoration of Israel (Is.60:22). This time of the Lord's favour, Isaiah explains, is the time of proclaiming the good news (Is.61:1). The good news is the announcement of God's reign (Is.52:7). And so, "the good news of the kingdom of God is that the one true God, with his life and peace and truth, is about to

establish his rule over the world. All other opposing powers – whether human powers or sin or evil or death – are destined to end their rule” (Stephen Hultgren, workingpreacher.org). This is the time that Jesus proclaims as fulfilled – the time of God’s kingdom, in the process of arriving in all its fullness. And we are in it.

That is exciting but it gets even more exciting. “The kingdom of God has come near,” Jesus asserts. The full level of excitement-worthiness is not readily apparent until we take a look at the Greek. The verb Jesus uses is “*eggizo*” (eng-id-zo) and, not only does it mean “has come near”, the kingdom is, in fact, so near that it is present. What Jesus is saying in the Greek is “I bring God’s kingdom in its fullness here with me.” Wherever Jesus was, conducting his ministry, there also God’s kingdom was actively coming into being. God’s reign and rule is breaking in presently in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus calls us to engage in God’s reign in two ways. The first call is to repent and it continues that sense of joyful urgency: Now is the time to turn around, back to lives rooted in God’s ways, turning away from everything that keeps us from doing that. The second is a call to believe which is the ongoing response to turning to God, following God’s ways. The belief we are called to is believing in the good news of God’s reign present in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The really exciting piece here is the order in which things happen. God’s reign is arriving. We are then called to turn our lives to God and then we are called to believe in the arriving kingdom. God’s rule is happening whether or not we are on board. Thankfully, it is arriving despite the fact that we don’t deserve it. It is arriving, God is saving us while we are yet sinners, as Paul says.

The world around us is full of calls...calls that, for many, overpower this good news that Jesus proclaims...calls that drown out the voice of Jesus telling us that all we need to do is turn and believe and the joy and the hope are ours. These calls from the world around us almost always have something to do with the desire to have more and be more than what we are. Many New Year Eve resolutions are made – and broken – in this desire to have more and be more. Some calls are more life-altering: a career change, a mid-life crisis...and scores of other adjustments to the compass settings of our life journeys.

The desire to follow a call to something more and better indicates a restlessness in humanity. Sometimes the restlessness is from boredom, often from dissatisfaction – the thought that somewhere else, someone else, something else, will be better, more satisfying. Sometimes the restlessness is in search of greater meaning. Tom Long writes that, “Many people yearn to become a citizen of a new and richer land”, hungering for wholeness, completeness (p.78). This is what is on offer from Jesus. Life in God’s kingdom is a life of wholeness. That is what salvation means: rescue, and being made whole. When we choose life in God’s kingdom, we allow God to rescue us from dissatisfaction, from happiness that comes and goes, from wanting more and better. Answering Jesus’ call leads us onto the path where we will find true joy and boundless hope that sustains and strengthens and satisfies completely.

Mark shows us “what the urgent call of the kingdom looks like. Jesus, walking along the Sea of Galilee, sees the two brothers Simon and Andrew, fishermen, casting their nets in the sea. He calls them to follow, and immediately, in obedience, they leave their nets and follow him. The same happens with James

and John. One of Mark's favorite phrases, "and immediately", gives expression to the urgency of the call. The time is here, God's kingdom is near; there is no time to lose! (Stephen Hultgren, workingpreacher.org). We don't know what goes through the minds of those four fishermen but we see them drop everything and follow Jesus.

They jumped at the chance to enter into life in God's kingdom by becoming followers of Christ that day. That is the same gift we have been given when we answer Jesus' call. Repent and believe the good news that God's kingdom is here, Jesus says. Life in the kingdom is ours and that is exciting but it is not the most exciting bit.

Once we are called and follow there is something we must do: Follow me and I will make you fishers of people, Jesus says. That same summons is for all of us. We are called and then we call others. Why is that the way it must be? Why didn't Jesus just go around doing all of the calling? Why do we have to do it?

Jesus carried the presence of God's kingdom. In all of his words and actions, he revealed that kingdom to others. Jesus is no longer physically present among us but he is present. We carry Jesus within us because we have the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are now the bearers of the kingdom. We are, as Bishop Lesslie Newbiggin pointed out, we are the sign, foretaste, and instrument of God's kingdom. We are a sign of the hope of life in God's kingdom. We are a foretaste of the joy of life in God's kingdom. And we are the instrument God chooses to proclaim the kingdom and to reveal the kingdom. That is the most exciting bit of all. We call others to join us in living the life of God's kingdom because the more

people there are who choose life in God's kingdom, the more God's kingdom will be revealed to the world.

In the book of Revelation, John is shown a door that opens to reveal the fullness of God's kingdom. He sees the throne room of heaven in all its splendour. These doors, N.T Wright calls them intersecting points between heaven and earth, they are all around us, allowing the breaking in of God's kingdom. Jesus was one of those doors and each one of us is a door. When we answer God's call and live according to God's call, we can open those doors and leave them open. As more and more people answer the call and live according to the call, more and more of those doors will open. For some people, God's call will come as a call to leave everything like the fishermen who became Jesus' first disciples. It will be "a call to leave our nets, our books, our desks, our homes. For others, perhaps most of us, it will come as a call to mend our nets more carefully, read our books more thoroughly, mind our desks more faithfully, live in our homes more lovingly" (Long, p.82).

Jesus' words are now our words: The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near! This is exciting.