

## **Sermon for Epiphany 3B The Text: Mark 1:14-20**

*Dear Heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit upon us so that we may repent and believe in the gospel for the sake of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.*

According to St Mark, today we hear what Jesus preached when he began his ministry. He said:

“The time is fulfilled.

The Kingdom of God has come near.

Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

Nice sermon. Short. To the point. I like it. We might wish all sermons were this short! But what does it all mean and how does it apply to us today?

Well, for starters, Jesus begins with time. The time is right, and the time is now, for Jesus to come and fulfil God’s promises.

But of course, it’s taken a long time. For example, a promised Saviour was mentioned in the Garden of Eden. That was a long time ago.

Many words were spoken by many prophets who promised a Messiah, a Christ who will come and save the people. Well, the ink dried on those prophecies hundreds and even thousands of years beforehand. Many faithful people have come and gone, waiting for the promised Messiah, but time went on without its fulfillment.

What we discover is that God’s timing and our timing doesn’t always match, which means we often have a problem with his timing. But if we question God’s timing, it means we also challenge the love of God or the power of God.

For instance, we might pray that God would do something for us like fix our health, fix our relationships, fix our finances, or fix our world. But we also start to place time limits on when we want God to fix things for us. We reckon if God is powerful and loving, he’ll do what we ask, and do it quickly!

You see, we’re not happy to wait. We’re finite beings with time limits placed upon us, so we expect God to act within our time limits as well. We might also reckon we know better than God as to when things should happen.

But God doesn’t get the timing wrong. We’re the ones who get it wrong. We don’t have eternity in mind. We’re often only concerned with the here and now. We don’t want to be patient. We don’t want time to heal things, or grow things, or learn things. We want instant fixes and an instant God.

But we learn from Scripture that our eternal and timeless God entered into our world where everything has a time limit. The One who has no beginning or end was born at a particular time in our human history in order to be with us as our God, to take on our finite humanity while somehow still remaining fully God with no time limits. He came at the right time to absorb our sin into himself so that he might

forgive us and grant us his innocence and holiness. He came at the right time to suffer and die and rise again for you and me.

Well, that time is now fulfilled in the person of Jesus. He came. He saw. He healed. He preached. He suffered. He died. He rose again. He ascended into heaven. But his time isn't over. He lives forever and the Spirit-filled gifts of grace He gave his fledgling church are where he comes to us in our own time through his Word and Sacraments.

Which means, now is the time when God's kingdom comes!

But we have funny ideas of what God's kingdom looks like. So did the disciples. So did everyone else.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, according to St Mark, identifies three main reactions to the coming of God's kingdom in the person of Jesus. Some followed him, including Simon and Andrew, James and John. Some didn't have a clue about what Jesus was on about and followed him in curiosity. And some were against him and sought to kill him.

But even those who followed him didn't really get it. We discover the chosen disciples were slow learners who got it wrong on many occasions. We also often get it wrong. The kingdom they thought they would see was a political and physical kingdom. But God's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom which is upside down and muddled up in our eyes.

God's kingdom makes the last first and the first last. In God's kingdom the King comes to serve and not be served. In God's kingdom, the criminals go free and the innocent One is punished. In God's kingdom, justice is served through forgiveness and mercy for those who believe.

We pray for God's kingdom to come in the Lord's Prayer, but do we pray that *God's* kingdom comes, or that *our* idea of what God's kingdom should look like comes?

It could be that our idea of God's kingdom might look like a political kingdom where only Christians get to rule and where we make sure our own moral and ethical standards are upheld across our society.

Our idea might look like a physical kingdom where churches are grand and full of people, where no sport is played on Sundays, and where the most faithful are also the most blessed.

Our idea of God's kingdom might demand good people are rewarded and bad people are punished. This of course presupposes we're the good people. We often struggle to remember that many whom Jesus spoke against also thought they were good people.

But God's kingdom isn't what we expect or even desire.

Our God and King wasn't born in a palace or even a well-resourced hospital. He was born among the poor. God's kingdom, in the person of Jesus, came to shepherds, fishermen, tax-collectors, prostitutes, the sick, the ostracized, the neglected, and the abused. God's kingdom ate and drank with sinners. God's kingdom spoke against those secure in their own self-righteousness.

What does God's kingdom really look like?

Well, our Lord allowed himself to be falsely accused. Our Lord didn't fight the charges. Our Lord was falsely tried and condemned by his own people. Our Lord was spit on, beaten and whipped and he said nothing. Our Lord was nailed to a cruel cross. Our Lord felt abandoned by his heavenly Father. Our Lord prayed: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And those words still echo throughout time as he prays the same for you and me. Our Lord died. Our Lord rose again to defeat death, the devil, and our sin. Our Lord ascended to rule eternally.

And our Lord, whose kingdom comes near to his people at the right time, proclaims for us to repent and believe in the gospel.

Well, that's ok, but many of us reckon we don't have anything to repent of in the first place. Most of us know we're sinners because the Bible tells us this, but we struggle to realise what are those things that we think and say and do that we need to repent of. And if we ever do figure out what we need to repent of, we defend our selfish actions and struggle to actually turn from thinking or saying or doing those things in any meaningful way!

You see, most of us are blind to what we do and how it affects those around us, especially God. We're not very good at assessing our own sins or how they hurt others. We're also not very good at seeing how we damage our relationship with God by our unrepentance.

So, how can we repent if we can't see our sin?

Well, one way to assess our own sin is to consider our vocations.

For example, we might consider whether we have been disobedient or lazy in our responsibilities as parents, spouses, workers, or children. Have we given those in authority over us the respect due to them as God's representatives to us? Have we been hot-tempered, rude or argumentative? Have we stolen, been negligent, or been wasteful? Have we been discontent with whom and what God has given us? Have we unfairly judged someone and think poorly of them?

Another way to assess our own sin is to consider our relationships.

For instance, have we noticed whether someone relates to us differently than they used to? Have they become more distant, less patient, or angry toward us? Have they ended their relationship with us? On the other hand, have we limited or ended our relationship with them? If so, is there anything we've done or said which upset

them? If we don't know, how might we find out? Is there anything they've done to us which we need to talk about with them?

In other words, what signs do we see within our relationships that may indicate we have something to repent of? In this case, are we willing to obey Christ's call to repentance, or will we remain disobedient and rebellious in our self-justifications?

But Jesus doesn't leave us in the depths of despair as we consider our sinfulness. He gives us one more instruction as our gracious King who comes at the right time. He tells us to believe in the gospel.

Now, in one sense, the gospel was still in its early stages as he preached this message. At this point of Jesus' ministry he hadn't suffered and died for the forgiveness of our sins yet. He hadn't risen again to give us the good news death has been defeated yet. But since the time was right for the Kingdom of God to come in the person of Jesus Christ, now is when the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection for our sake is happening so that we may believe.

But is it so easy to believe?

We can be a suspicious lot because we don't always know what to believe. Unfortunately, we often believe what people tell us through their speculating gossip (and fail to check their authenticity), but we struggle to believe the truth of what Jesus tells us. In other words, we find it easier to believe something bad about someone than believe something good that God does for us!

But God doesn't lie. What God says, happens. So, instead of believing what people say about us (or about anyone else for that matter), we should believe the truth of what Jesus says.

So, if Jesus says we're forgiven, then forgiven we are. Let God have the last say instead of our troubled consciences.

If Jesus says this is his body and blood, then that's what it is, given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. He can't lie or deceive us.

If Jesus tells us that we're children of God who have inherited eternal life because we've been washed and made holy by his blood, then that's who we are.

If Jesus tells us to follow him, then we're to follow him in faithful trust knowing his gracious Kingdom has now come at the right time for those who repent and believe. Salvation is ours through faith, through trusting God's Word, through believing what he says and does for us. Therefore, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus tells us: "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near! Repent, and believe in the gospel..."

*...so that the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*