

Sermon Epiphany 3 Year B

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

Mark 1:14-20

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 fishermen. 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.

Prayer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN

Sermon:

Today we read St. Paul's 1st letter to the new church in Corinth.ⁱ

He was all about urgency. Paul felt that time was growing short.

In fact, he said, "...the appointed time has grown short".ⁱⁱ

So Paul gave practical advice:

Husbands should leave their wives alone.

No point in making babies when
the end of everything was just around the corner.ⁱⁱⁱ

No point in buying stuff.

Paul founded the church in Corinth – around 50 CE.

He wrote his 1st letter around 53–54 CE.

He wrote because someone had written to him,

Telling him about the problems in Corinth and

Asking Paul to help straighten things out.

Paul had learned that the new Christians in Corinth had

Been in touch with various other Christian evangelists,

who had different spins on Jesus and his work.

Back then, like today, Folks didn't agree even on the basics.^{iv}

They didn't get along any better back then,

Than they do now. ^v

Time flies.

The more things change, the more they remain the same.

“The time is fulfilled” Jesus said.

“... the kingdom of God has come near”.

Time is a strange thing.

...

The three wise man had a long and arduous journey.

The Three Wise Men were late.

When the men finally arrived

the little known “Three Wise Women” were already there.

The Men were late because they followed a Star, while

The Three Wise Women asked for directions!

The Three Wise Women also brought practical gifts.

And when they arrived, in plenty of time,

They helped to deliver the baby.

And they patiently waited.

...

Time matters.

God is eternal, but God also created time.

Time matters. And Jesus is sensitive about time. *Let's not waste it.*

“The time is fulfilled” Jesus said.

“... the kingdom of God has come near”.

He had a lot of work to do and not a lot of time.

Time matters. Jesus is the Son of God. He knows the future.
But while he was here Just like the rest of us,
he was stuck in human time.

He knew the system that he lived in.
He knew how things rolled.]
He knew what happened to people who said what he said.
and did what he did.

He wept in the Garden.
He knew that back then, *just like today*,
If you upset the powers that be, you won't last long.^{vi}

The Gospel tells us that Jesus was time sensitive
about his work, here.

Jesus was all about eternity, but he had work to do here,
in this very finite - - soon to pass -- real world.

So he called Simon and Andrew,
While they were catching fish, and said,
"Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

He meant, *right now*, and the Gospel says
they *immediately* left their nets and followed him."^{vii}

And then he "Immediately" called Zebedee and his brother John.

Jesus was definitely in kind of a hurry
when he called those men out of their comfort zone.

He did say "Follow Me".
But also said "Repent,...the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Many Christians think that Jesus meant:

“You guys better change your ways
because heaven is just around the corner,
and you don’t want to miss out.”

But, repentance isn’t that simple.

It’s not so much about us, as it is about others.

Repentance is more than just saying you’re sorry,
and getting a reward.

It’s more than an apology and a promise to change our ways.

Jesus wasn’t thinking about just us, in our self-centered world.

He was launching the Kingdom of God, for everyone!

And what *is* the “Kingdom of God”?

It isn’t all that clear, to tell you the truth.

I can tell you what it isn’t.

It isn’t “heaven”.

It isn’t some sort of Divine “utopia”.

It certainly isn’t the Church.

It does have something to do with living a Messiah filed life.

Back in Jesus’ day, many faithful Jews had Messianic expectations.

They imagined their people returning from exile,
after the defeat of their ancient enemies.

They imagined a new Davidic Kingdom, basking in God’s glory.

But that wasn’t - and that isn’t -

what the Kingdom of Heaven was about.

What is the Kingdom of Heaven about?

Jesus wasn't really talking about a place,
Or a culture or a moment in history.

He was talking about a state of being. A way of living.
Where our hearts renewed.
Where we find peace and joy,
Not in what we look for or win or get,
But in what we give and what we do for others.

The key to the Kingdom of God, is found in service.

Jesus focused on the poor and the outcast.
He touched the untouchable. Again and again.
And the untouchable reached out to him.

In fact Mark's gospel, there's a Greek word that, in English,
is often defined as "people" or "multitude".

But it might also mean something like a "mob" –
a group of sinners, of the outcast and of the impoverished.

That is where they'd find Jesus.
That is where you'll still find him.
And that is where you'll find his Kingdom.

Jesus invites us all to ask for the Kingdom of God, as His gift.
But be careful what you ask for.

Jesus' Kingdom of God is synonymous with life.
We've got to live in that Kingdom.

It's a new reality. A new life. A new way of being human.

Try it out!

Take a breath.

Sing a song of praise. Give someone a hug.

Say a prayer for someone you don't like.

Feed someone who is hungry.

Hug a tree.

Go fishing.

-AMEN

i



ii “For the present form of this world is passing away.”

iii Wouldn't that be an interesting Scripture to engage in a discussion about reproductive rights?

iv How wrote, for example, that all Christians are to be regarded "as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries" (4:1). 2,000 years later the disagreements amongst Christians are as vibrant as ever.

v See, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Letter-of-Paul-to-the-Corinthians>.

vi They still don't. People still kiss the Bishop's ring actually or metaphorically.

vii Emphasis added.