

Mark 1:14-20

In John's gospel we read how some Greeks who were in Jerusalem for the Passover feast came to Philip, Jesus' disciple, and said "sir we would see Jesus" (John 12:21).

Down the years those words have been used almost as an injunction to preachers and I have stood in pulpits where there has been a plaque with those words on, "sir we would see Jesus".

As Christians it is important that we regularly focus on Jesus and are reminded who he is and what he has done for us. It is through this that our faith in him is refreshed and grows.

So over the next 8 weeks this is the encouragement to those of us who preach "sir we would see Jesus". We will try as we move through Lent to help us see Jesus as we look at Mark's gospel and along with that the homegroups are looking at Mark and there is the Lent book, 'Seeing and Savouring Jesus' by John Piper and of course the Lent reflection series Jesus me and you – you could almost think it was planned. Then hopefully we will, in the words of the prayer of Richard of Chichester, "know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly and follow thee more nearly, day by day.

Well with that in mind let's pray and let me use that prayer of Richard of Chichester, "Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits Thou hast given me, for all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me. O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may I know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly and follow thee more nearly, day by day."

As we begin looking at Jesus in Mark's gospel we look today at Jesus as 'Pioneer of the Kingdom'.

What we see in these verses Mark 1:14-15 is that Jesus has come as King bringing in his Kingdom and that demands a response.

1. The change v14a

Mark doesn't mention the birth of Jesus, rather he begins with the announcement of the one who was to come. V4, "John came baptising" and this was in fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah mentioned there in v3. However v14, "After John was put in prison, Jesus".

There is the change over in those few words. John the Baptist has been put in prison, and so his ministry effectively comes to an end. In athletics terms the pacemaker departs leaving the track for the champion. The ministry of John is over and in a sense also that of the prophets because the one to whom they were looking has come. We see this in Mark 1:1 and there we see who this one who has come is, "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God".

The one who the prophets spoke about and who John had come to prepare the way for has come. He has come as Christ, as Messiah, and he is God. The King has come. Note also v12&13 because he has come out of the desert where has been not for forty years but forty days but he came out without sin for he is the true Israel.

Here is a significant change the old has gone the new has come. The King has arrived and he comes to the people of God as rescuer to bring in his Kingdom.

2. The proclamation v14b&15a

John came baptising and Jesus came proclaiming. I understand what people mean when they say actions speak louder than words and certainly God the Father's action in sending the son into the world speaks volumes of the love of God but the Son came with words which were backed up by actions yes but words without which the actions would have been impossible to understand. What was he proclaiming? The good news of God - the evangel, the gospel. The good news Jesus proclaimed is defined in the next two phrases, "the time has come, the Kingdom of God is near" – as plain as mud!

So what is the good news?

a. the time has come

we are all aware of special times for example 7.30am 6th Feb 1952; 12.30pm 22nd Nov 1963; 3.56pm 9 Dec 2010. The first was when a servant discovered King George VI had died and so Elizabeth became Queen. The second was when John F Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas and the third was when Caleb my first grandchild was born all things that change lives.

However Jesus' reference here to the time has come in very much in a different league.

This is the point in time towards which the whole of salvation history has been moving. God had made the world and placed in it humans, male and female, to live in a relationship with him.

However, in the garden of Eden human sin destroyed that relationship and separated humans from God. God's plan, made before the creation of the world, was to restore that relationship through the rescuer he would send, who would be his Son. Now that time has come. The rescuer, the Messiah had come. God has entered his world in Jesus nothing ever the same

b. The Kingdom of God is near

With King Jesus comes the Kingdom of God, the return of the rule of God that was there before the fall in the Garden of Eden. Jesus coming begins the return of that reign. He is the pioneer of the Kingdom. We see the effect of this in the pushing back of sin and death, two of the effects of what took place in the garden of Eden.

The kingdom is near that is it is at hand, it is beginning, it did not then and has not now come in its fullness.

On 4th August 1876 guests at the home of Alexander Graham Bell heard people in Brantford, which was four miles away, reading and singing by means of an improvised telephonic connection. The telephone was at hand! Similarly the kingdom is near we see the effect of the power of the King but it is not yet perfect nor is it yet complete. The Kingdom will not come in its fullness until he returns

as King and so both then and now people live in the now and not yet. Yes the kingdom has come we get a taste of it but it hasn't fully come and so we don't see and experience it fully but the good news is that the King has come as pioneer of the Kingdom and God's power is being seen in the world in a new way.

3. The command v15b

Jesus came proclaiming the good news of the coming of the Kingdom of God and then called people to respond to God's rule in repentance and belief.

I'm sure we have been reminded often that repentance means having a change of mind about the course of our lives. Matthew was talking the other day about heading the wrong way on the tube line and needing to get off and go the other way. Repentance is when we recognise that we are living our lives our way and changing to live God's way. Belief is an active faith in Jesus as God and saviour and often it is that belief or faith which stirs our repentance.

Jesus as King came bringing his kingdom and part of the proclamation was this command to allow the king to be king and rule in the lives of those who should be his subjects.

Note this is not a polite request. This is not a "would you mind awfully...." this is a command. Paul speaking in Athens in the Areopagus said "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:30) The past was before Jesus was revealed as King but now there is the command. This is the King saying how things must be – it is a royal decree.

In case you have never done that let me remind you that God is the loving ruler of the world and he made us to relate to him as God and under him to rule the world. However we all reject that and we supplant God as ruler and run our lives our way. That way leads to death and separation from God for ever. But in love God sent his son Jesus into the world. Jesus lived under God's the Father's rule and died taking our punishment for sin and through that death we can be forgiven. Jesus rose again as ruler of the world and in him is the life of God. That leaves us two options. We can continue our way and face death and God's judgement or we can hear and respond to the command of the King repent and believe, submit to Jesus as King and through that know God's forgiveness and eternal life. Jesus came as King bringing his Kingdom and that demands a response where we submit to him as king. If you have never done that will you do it? If you have done it will you encourage your friends and family to do it?

But then for many of us who have done this the words of Jesus come to us in a slightly different way. We have accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord and are living in a relationship with him. To us the command continues to speak but about our on going life. It is about the day by day act of repenting and believing.

We saw this in Lifeshapes. In the first of the shapes we recognised that most of us see life as a straight line from cradle to grave and our spiritual life as the same from salvation to heaven. However along that line an event, which can be described as a kairos moment causes us to stop and brings us to an intersection. The word kairos is the Greek word we have in our passage here as “time”.

The event can be small a child falling over, going to the pictures with a friend or big, moving house. The event can be good, passing your driving test, or bad losing a loved one. We all have many such events in our lives some daily some less often. The question is how do we process that event?

We can simply go on as if nothing has happened ignoring the event.

We can stop and not move on as sometimes people do when a loved one dies and they create a little shrine to that person and live as if they hadn’t died.

We can go backwards to a safe place – you see the child who has been frightened by a dog giving all dogs a very wide berth.

Or we can use the Kairos moment to move us into the learning circle. That is we can process what has happened.

Jesus said, “The time has come, the Kingdom of God is near repent and believe the good news.”

We encounter an event and we want God to speak through that event bringing more of his kingdom into our lives and growing us as followers of Jesus and we do that as we repent and believe.

As we encounter Kairos moments so we repent and believe and as we do so this changes us, grows us as disciples and moves us on along our journey with Jesus and through it God blesses us as we see more of him at work in our lives and more of his Kingdom at work in our world.

these words are the two sides of the learning circle – repent and believe.

But then there are three stages to each of these and this is where it differs from the secular pattern.

- a. observe – when an event happens have to observe it correctly – what thought/said/did. And face it.
- b. Reflect – processing the facts why feel/react as did? What are causes – asking honest questions.
- c. Discuss – invite others in – gives objectivity can include confessing sin.

Then start to believe change is possible

- a. plan in response – what need to do to behave differently to see more of God in this area?
- b. Accountability – externalise the process. If can’t discuss probably not going to change.
- c. Act – need to do something. We are good at talking not at acting.

When we were doing Lifeshapes I remember someone saying to me that at one point he had been concerned that he had not been able to witness at church and so he prayed about it. So he had

observed and reflected, not sure whether he had discussed it. But then he was ready and so when someone said, “I’m not religious” and Ian simply saying “I am” which led to a conversation and the guy going on Alpha.

With this in mind to those of us following Jesus and submitting to him as King we might paraphrase Mark 1:15 to read “I want you to enter into a lifestyle of repentance and faith that is committed to learning from me. Listen to me and stay close to me especially in the moments I give to you to learn.”

Jesus came as pioneer of the Kingdom of God. He came as King bringing in the kingdom and one day he will return as King to claim the Kingdom for his own. In between he calls us to respond to his rule as King to repent and believe and through that to live with him as King in our lives.