

**“Called to Proclaim Good News”
Mark 1:14-20**

Our gospel reading today begins in the middle of a story.
The first thing we learn is that John the Baptist has been arrested.
When a story begins with someone getting arrested,
 we need to find out why.
It’s like walking into your family room where the rest of the family
 is watching a TV program that’s already half-way through,
 it’s a good idea at the first commercial break to get them to tell you
 what you missed.

Why has John been arrested?
Has he broken a law? Did he not pay his taxes? Has he hurt someone?
Mark says that John has been out in the dessert preaching.
And he’s been attracting a really big crowd with the things he’s been preaching.
 He offers forgiveness of sins, and a new way of life.
 He calls his listeners to “Prepare the way of the Lord”
 He tells them,
 Get Ready! God’s Messiah is coming into the world!

Which sounds like it should have been good news.
But someone apparently doesn’t think so.
Someone doesn’t like the fact
 that this prophet clothed in camels hair and a leather belt
 is attracting ‘the whole Judean countryside’
 out into the dessert.

Someone with the power to do something about John and his preaching
 doesn’t want to hear this good news.

So, the situation is tense; and it is political – a conflict of powers.
John – who has established quite a following – is arrested for his preaching.
John’s as-yet-unidentified-opponents have had their way...for now.

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Then into the midst of this conflict enters Jesus
 when he arrives on the scene in Galilee.
It is a bit daring of Jesus to choose to come to Galilee,
 knowing that John had been arrested.

So far his experience in the region has been fairly pleasant...
...His baptism in the Jordan by John must have been a spiritual high point:
 when he witnessed the heavens torn apart
 and the Spirit of God descending upon him like a dove.

and the voice coming down from heaven, saying
“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

...Even the 40 days he spent in the wilderness,
being tempted by Satan
living with the wild beasts,
must have been encouragement to his spirit
since the whole time he was waited on by angels.

But now Jesus chooses to enter this scene of conflict.
And he doesn't hold back – he picks up right where John left off.
Immediately he begins to proclaim
the same message which landed John in jail.
The message is simple, in some respects,
but the fact that John ended up in jail for preaching it
suggests that the simplicity doesn't hide
the radical challenge of this message.

The message Jesus proclaims is the good news of God,
the time has come for the kingdom of God to draw near.
The time has come for the people of God to REPENT,
to turn around, to change direction,
and by their change of direction show that they believe
the good news is true.

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It's not surprising really, if we listen to what Jesus and John were preaching,
that someone should try to silence them.
The message is a political one –
that is, it challenges the powers that rule the world.
If you announce that THE kingdom has drawn near
that has to mean that the present kingdom with its rulers
is going to pass away.

For Jesus and John
the powers were Herod – and ultimately Caesar.
and those scribes and Pharisees who aligned themselves
with the powers-that-be.
These guys weren't too happy about the following that John and Jesus
were beginning to attract.

I wonder, if John and Jesus came preaching in America today,
in Pittsburgh...even in Glenshaw...
what or who might they be in conflict with?

I wonder what...or who...are the powers that rule our world
and our everyday lives, today...

Perhaps it would be the power of a Consumer Culture

when he begins to proclaim the good news of God.

But what is this good news? What is the gospel, really?

Some would spell it out in plain and simple terms –

1-2-3 salvation by the numbers.

But Jesus doesn't do that – the gospel of Mark doesn't do that.

The good news is still a little vague at this point.

Something about the kingdom of God and a new way of life.

Instead of giving a simple answer,

Mark begins to describe Jesus life and ministry,

and in Jesus life and ministry we begin to see

the good news *taking shape*

So then, pay attention to the very next thing Jesus does,

because it is revolutionary

it is very political

and it is very congruent with his message

about the coming kingdom of God.

Jesus takes a walk on the beach, along the Sea of Galilee.

And as he walks he comes upon Simon and Andrew

who are going about their business

behaving as law-abiding citizens

participating in the economy, the Market,

using the technology of their day,

casting a net into the sea –

so they can catch some fish, earn a living.

And Jesus sees them and says to them,

“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

A simple invitation...that changes the world.

“Follow me.”

“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

You see, the very next thing that Jesus does after announcing the good news of God –

which is heard by the powerful as particularly bad news –

the very next thing that Jesus does is to

call together a community.

Jesus calls to himself a community of disciples

a community of disciples who will take up a new task

the task of proclaiming the same message that Jesus proclaims

the same message that John proclaimed

that got him thrown in jail

and that will one day get Jesus crucified.

Jesus doesn't say, “Follow me and I will indoctrinate you.”

or “Follow me and I will juice your spiritual batteries once a week”

or “Follow me and I will make you wealthy, or beautiful, or popular.”

but “Follow me and I will send you on a mission – my mission –
to proclaim good news
and to live together as a community of good news
and community that shows forth the kingdom of God to the world.

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Our community of faith, gathered here today in this sanctuary,
is nothing less than the continuation of this story.
We are the community of disciples that Jesus has called together.
We are the ones Jesus has called
to hear the good news
to turn our lives around
and to go out into the world with Jesus
to announce that the kingdom of God has come near.
We are the community formed
by the waters of baptism
and the winds of the Spirit,
just as Jesus’ mission began
in those same waters
and by that same Spirit.

And I, for one, am grateful that Jesus has called me to be on this journey
and share in this mission.
I am particularly grateful that God has led me to be on this journey with you
and to share in this mission with you.

I look forward to the coming days and months and years
as I get to know all of you, and you get to know me
as we, together, begin to name the powers of this world
that would destroy our life
and as we – in the face of those powers –
announce THE power, and THE kingdom
in which life finds us.

The questions we asked earlier,
“what if Jesus came today...” is not really the right question.
Because, my friends, Jesus is here today,
in the worship and work of this community of faith
in this congregation
called Glenshaw Presbyterian Church.

Jesus invites us
to turn our lives, and our life together,
toward him
As we do, perhaps we will see the kingdom of God
taking shape in our midst.

Amen.