

Mark 1:14-20 *Now 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.*

It is rarely good form to start your sermon off quoting Greek from the pulpit, particularly if you are an amateur Greek scholar at best (that's me!). And even our third graders can attest, in examining one of the early Greek manuscript scripts yesterday our Bible worship, one of the students managed to stump me asking about the greek language (it happens most years due to great questions by 3rd graders). Nevertheless, here we are, and I persist.

Because our text this morning is likely the powerful exception, in our reading from the first chapter of Mark's gospel account one particular word jumps off the page at me. You see it first, before our text this morning, with John the Baptist shouting it to the long line of sinners flooding to the Jordan. Then still dripping wet from his own baptism, Jesus kicks off this passage, and his public ministry, by shouting it to anyone who will listen.

The Greek word is *Metanoete*, a verb that is plural in number, present in tense, active in voice, and imperative in mood. Which is what we'll unpack together today. In English this word is typically translated as Repent, sometimes as turn around, or rarely but often best as, to changes one's mind.

Unfortunately, 'repent' limps around most churches these days, handicapped by those crazy street preachers with condemning signs or big bullhorns, who misuse and overuse it. They use it to evoke scary images of an angry God by thumping their Bibles and haranguing passerbys or really anyone in sight. And sadly today, most normal preachers seem all too happy to donate it to denominations and sects that love its harsh and severe sound, using it as a theological dagger, an ominous threat to 'change your ways' before some heavenly storm, brewing overhead, showers it judgement upon you.

Yet, that is not how Mark uses *metanoete*. This enticing verb in Mark has an almost irresistible allure. It has that quality of persistence, like one of our members who stopped by the church yesterday to pick something up, who I heard banging on the

door just to see if he could get inside. After Jesus' baptism, and having survived the temptations in the desert, he arrives in Galilee, to announce that God's reign is within breathing distance: *Metanoete!* It's a lot like Tim's sermon from last week that demands you come and see!

Now without question *Repent* carries with it the notion that we have some changing to do, some new directions to take; its primary orientation, though, is towards God's future rather than our past. In Mark especially, *Repent* is an active invitation to turn towards and trust in a future made possible only by the grace and justice of God.

Repent is among the first words Jesus speaks in Mark's Gospel. Why? Because in Jesus, God makes it possible for God's people to do more than rerun the past. This good news, those glad tidings we sang about through Christmas, are an invitation to turn and hold on for dear life. Turn! Says our Lord, things do not have to stay the way they are now! In fact, follow Jesus and things are guaranteed to not stay the same way they are now.

This is such a timely message for us today. Just think about all the things that we are desperately in need of changing; affordable, accessible healthcare; ecological devastation; racial injustice and violence; radical income inequality; our addiction to a war economy; our polarized political state; just to name a few.

This baby king that we left being greeted by wise Magi from far off places, following a the long tail of a great comet to a backwater town in nowhere-ville matches up with a Jesus who emerges in Galilee, neither the religious nor intellectual center in Jesus' day. Galilee is on the outside of the mainstream socioeconomic and political life. It is home to the marginalized and the oppressed, the left out and the exploited.

Jesus announces this good news not in NYC or the city of angels, not in Capernaum or Tiberias, nor Chicago or San Francisco. He chooses Galilee. Galilee is instead liminal space. The in between like a place where animals lay, like a place where rent money always ends up spent on emergencies before the end of the month, or where immigrant families are forced to bunk up in small apartments together, or the poorest in rural counties have to stock up on the food bank drop offs and donated deer meat once a month just to make it through, or the parent who is strung out at the end of their ropes desperate to stop losing arguments to their toddler.

You see friends, Jesus knows this, and Jesus calls for us to turn towards a God who is promising things do not have to stay the way they are now! Just ask Simon

Peter, Andrew, or James, and John - the first disciples - none of whom even applied for the job. Just ask Peter's mother-in-law, whose fever cooled with Jesus' soothing touch, or the leper whose life was no longer outcast from society and family because his disease left him after he met Jesus. Just ask those friends, who will lower their paralytic friend through the roof, or the man whose hand caught more of Jesus' attention than obeying sabbath regulations. It is imperative that we pay attention!

Yet, not everyone hears this as good news. Some spend their lives insisting that things stay just the way they are; they expend exorbitant amount of time and money making sure that things remain the same. Those folks come from all walks of life, and even sometimes those people are even preachers, and sometimes those are people that sit in the pews. Who needs to repent when nothing needs to change? Throughout Mark's gospel, the religious leaders are so dead set on maintaining the religious status quo that they lose sight of the One for whom life was meant to be lived... And I'm sure that as you hear me say that, you think sure, sure, (wink) it was just religious people way back when, that will fight tooth and nail to hold onto as passing way of life, right?

Repent, turn around, *metanoete!* means that every old way of living is going to change, every wall of resistance is going to fall, including the most formidable wall of sin. This is why Jesus starts out by saying 'your sins are forgiven.' In those four words, Jesus announces to every human being two things, first that sin is real, and that second even when it gets the best of us, or reduces us, or demeans us, and makes us turn from all God intends for us, both as individuals and communities; that God's still got us. God isn't hung up on it, he just wants us to get up off our mat, and go again.

God is like our persistent third grader who yesterday had hundreds of great questions about what this sacred text is, where it came from, what those bold or red letters in the Bible I handed her might mean. Jesus is demanding of us to pay attention, to not duck out of the details, to not bypass this for something more spotlighted, more flashy. It's like the constant questioning of children, who can, if we pay attention, show us the way to the reign of God around us.

You see, as I was saying, *Metanoete* is in present tense, it carries with it the idea that of continuous action. You don't just accept this change once and be done with it, no! Wouldn't that be great if all our fresh starts would result in totally changed people and churches and nations? Wouldn't it be great if we just had to preach, read, or hear a teaching of Jesus once and then we had it mastered?

We know better. No sooner are we to the middle of January that most of our new year's resolutions are going by the wayside. No sooner do we promise to eat right, act kinder, forgo sweets or caffeine, then do we snap at our kids, scarf down burgers and fries, and binge on treats. No sooner do we resolve ourselves to be a better nation than we act in a way that portrays us as anything but kind or generous to the world. No sooner do we paint the church of a place of high moral values, than we sell out to be closer to the seats of power. No sooner do we proclaim our value to care for all, than we clam shut wondering if it is worth breaking the rules to offer assistance to ones in need.

Which brings me to the best part of this fabulous greek verb, it's plural. Over the years, in english, we have downsized this powerful Greek verb into a singular, private affair. Of course, a person's decision whether to follow Jesus is deeply personal, but Metanoete! Is a plural imperative that extends beyond one's personal decision. Mark refuses to reduce it to a privatized response, as though the invitation of Jesus involves 'just me and Jesus.' Mark will have none of that. Believing the gospel is a group effort. Christian life is lived in community, always has been always will be.

It is our collective challenge, my friends, to turn towards the God that loves this world so dang much, that Jesus comes to proclaim Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand! Come and follow me!

Now I don't know about you, but preaching from Mark, especially Mark 1, can leave me a little breathless. It is fuel after fuel of the rapid-fire movement, with Mark stitching each scene together with his favorite adverb, immediately! Mark uses that word as kindling to set the fire of his Gospel aflame. Yet, it's imperative that we pay attention to that because there is something about Jesus, says Mark, that demands our attention - immediately.

So are you willing to rise to God's challenge? You see, because together, we can do more. Here at Broadway Christian Church it is our ever present mission to bring this living God, as disclosed in Jesus Christ into Columbia Missouri, our own little plot of land not in Washington DC, not in Paris, Beijing or Jerusalem. Jesus chooses Galilee as the place to emerge with his new vision for what God is doing in the world working to not leave a single injustice standing and he is out there calling people to follow. How about it, Broadway? Are you willing? Cause I am.

** I would like to give credit to Gary W. Charles for inspiring this sermon through this beautiful essay in the commentary Feasting on the Word pertaining to this passage.