

Sermon: 2021/02/07 (5th Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B) - Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-7,11-12, 21c; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39_BTR

[Invite children to the front]

Kids' Talk: God & Grasshoppers

[Old fashioned wooden clothes pins, googly-eyes, green pipe-cleaners.]

'It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers': [Is. 40:22].

Have you ever climbed to the top of a mountain or a skyscraper, and looked down at the people walking around, far below?

What do they look like (when you're up so high)?

[Ants.]

Right!

Well, in ancient Israel they had a very similar *idiom*.

We just heard it!

Isaiah the prophet told us that, from God's perspective, (*waaay(!)* up there in Heaven), we are like *grasshoppers!*

(Because He is so *massive* and *marvellous*.)

[Let's make some!]

These "grasshoppers" help remind us about the wonderful, *powerful* nature of God.

Let's pray:

Lord God, ..., in Jesus' name, amen.

'[T]he [M]essage'

'[Jesus] answered [them], "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." And He went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.'

What was 'the message' [Mk. 1:38 & 39]?

We heard Mark mention it *twice* in what is a relatively short passage.

And he mentions it like we know to what he refers.

He feels, we see, no compunction about just saying what he says.

The assumption, *clearly*, is that we *know* what 'the message' was that Jesus was talking about.

But I don't think should pretend.

I don't think we should *assume*:

I think if we sat *three* Episcopalians down in a room and asked them to explain; to *elaborate* as to what 'the message' was, we'd get at least *four* answers.

Or maybe none! - *Maybe*, the question would be greeted with a lot of awkward silence, shuffling of feet and gaze-avoidance.

Or lots of throat-clearing and false starts - a great deal of "well, it's hard to say," and, "hm, that's complicated. It's sort of like but not really."

So, let's remind ourselves.

Let's remind ourselves of 'the message' that Jesus hoped to share not just in Capernaum [v.21] - which is the 'city' spoken of in our text, but also in 'the neighboring towns' [v.38] and 'throughout [all of] Galilee' [v.39], in fact.

And 'to the ends of the earth' adds Luke in Acts: [1:8].

It's actually straightforward.

And we only need to look back a few verses to find it;

specifically, to verse 15 - to the *very* first thing that Mark's gospel records Jesus as having said publicly following His baptism, which was: "'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'"

That's it!

One sentence.

About 20 words.

You can share it in a single breath.

This is what God became incarnate to tell us.

This is His *own* commentary - *the Creator's "commentary"* - about why He came and why He went to the Cross.

It bears repeating, then:

"The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Let's quickly break 'th[is] message' down:

What 'time is fulfilled'?

Well, the 'time' of waiting.

- human history.

That is to say, human *led* or human *dominated* "history," with all of its "ups" and its many, *many* "downs."

This is the 'time' of "The Curse" - I'm alluding to both *Genesis* 3:17, here - what God tells Adam and Eve following their disobedience - *and* what Paul (the Apostle) tells the Galatians - *human* history is the time of *The Law* and lawlessness:

[3:10-11.

(In conflict with one-another: like a giant game, *thousands* of years in length, of "tug-of-war.")

The 'time' of decay and disease.

But that's ending (we hear), because the Messiah has come!

Promised *many* centuries ago by the prophets.

The Messiah will rule, they told us, from 'the throne of David': [e.g. *Is.* 9:7].

That is to say - as I reminded you last week - that the Messiah would rule *directly*, among us - Emmanuel.

We're talking, in other words, about *politics*.

But not of presidents or congresses and all that messy disappointment - rather, the Lord Himself.

And what will it be like?

(When He is *truly* king.

Not just in my heart, but literally and personally on the earth?)

'Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more': [Rev. 21:4].

That's *Revelation*.

Isaiah this morning adds too, that the weak will be strong and the old young;

that those who are crippled will not only walk but '*run*': [40:29f.].

And how can I be part of this?

'...[W]hat must I do to inherit eternal life?' to enjoy Jesus' paradisaal reign? [Mk. 10:17]

'Repent'.

'[C]onfess'.

'[C]onfess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart...[and] you will be saved': [Rom. 10:9].

Because He paid my penalty, 'the price' (of entry), giving us access.

That's *my* (brief) elaboration of 'the message'.

My...summation - using just a "handful" of quotes from (elsewhere) in the Bible.

And one might use slightly different words or texts, but the point is is that it's really not hard, but rather simple and wonderful.

So shouldn't we be sharing it?

This "simple" and "wonderful" 'message'?

Yes.

Notice how, to Jesus, 'the message' is more important than continuing with either His healings *or* performing exorcisms:

Mark is clear to indicate that though He had done many of these things for the local people, *lots* more went without that day because 'the message' was given priority.

Why?

Because more serious than their suffering is our *spiritual* condition.

And this is an very alien way of thinking, right?

And that's because all of our lives are spent mostly thinking about *physical* things - the comfort, nutrition, and appearance of our *bodies*.

Our bodies and the bodies of others.

And Jesus ministered to the bodies of some Galileans, we see.

Indeed, it looks like from the passage that Jesus exhausted Himself caring for all those who limped, crawled, and staggered to see Him during His short visit with Peter's mother-in-law.

But we see too, I think, that Jesus' heart was deeply torn - "torn" in two directions - and, eventually, it can't be denied that the concern with 'the message' of calling men and women like us to "repentance" came out on top.

So, the question for me is:

Do I share that priority?

Or am I more comfortable with addressing "physical" matters rather than the spiritual?

And you know the answer!

You know both that not only do I not "exhaust" myself in caring for the physically needy like Christ *nor* do I share His greater anxiety about saving people from damnation and destruction.

I am a failure on those *two* fronts.

But that can change.

That can change right now.

Today.

Rejoice, then.