

Epiphany 3 B
Mark 1:14-20
January 21, 2024

“Urgent Good News”
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

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 lake—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.

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An older gentleman stood beside a puddle that had formed in front of a local pub. He held a stick with a string on the end and jiggled it up and down in the water. Confused by the older man's actions, a curious fellow asked what he was doing. The older man said he was fishing. Thinking the gentleman was a bit cuckoo, the curious fellow invited him to have a drink in the pub. While sipping their whiskey, the curious fellow asked the older gentleman how many fishes he'd caught so far. The gentleman replied, saying: "You're the eighth one tonight!"¹

While it's certainly possible to catfish people or fish for people, the idea seems a bit dubious to me. When I read this text from Mark's gospel, I

¹ Lois Oladejo. "An Old Man Was Fishing in a Puddle," Amomama.com, September 25, 2020:
<https://news.amomama.com/230010-daily-joke-an-old-man-was-fishing-a-pudd.html>.

tend to get stuck on this second statement of Jesus' about fishing for people rather than focusing on his first statement, which is by far the more important of the two. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near," he says. "Repent, and believe in the good news!"

Jesus declares to whoever would listen that the time is fulfilled, the *Kairos* is fulfilled, that they've come to a critical moment in time, a divine appointment with destiny. The realm of heaven is near, even here, so repent, turn around, and live like you believe this good news.

I wonder, though, if Jesus' message feels like good news to our ears? It certainly feels serious, urgent, pressing. It's as if John the Baptizer's arrest had lit a fire under Jesus and, suddenly, he had purpose, had drive. It was time, past time, for his message to be shared. The people had a divine deadline that couldn't be missed!

This does not feel like particularly good news to me. I don't know about you, but I'm constantly plagued by deadlines. My contributions to the Tidings are due on the 15th of the month, my report to the Cabinet is due on the third Monday of the month. Bulletin info is due Monday of every week. A sermon title is due no later than Thursday and a full manuscript due every Friday morning. Tax returns are due in April, estimated tax payments are due quarterly, most bills are due monthly. If I miss a deadline, then I face the wrath of Shelley, or I mess up her deadlines, or I get a fine. Does anyone else dread deadlines? While in all truth, Shelley is extremely lenient with me, divine or otherwise, deadlines just don't feel like good news!

But here's Jesus, with a fire ant in his pants hollering about the good news of humanity's immanent date with destiny. I don't know about you, but my calendar is already full! How is this good news?

In his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, the late Joseph Ratzinger (better known as Pope Benedict XVI), tells us that Greek word *euangelion*, translated as *good news* means so much more. *Good news*

sounds attractive, but it falls far short of the order of magnitude of what is actually meant by the word *evangelion*. This term figures in the vocabulary of the Roman emperors, who understood themselves as lords, saviors, and redeemers of the world. The messages issued by the emperor were called in Latin *evangelium*, regardless of whether or not their content was particularly cheerful and pleasant. The idea was that what comes from the emperor is a saving message, that it is not just a piece of news, but a change of the world for the better.

When the Evangelists adopt this word, and it thereby becomes the generic name for their writings, what they mean to tell us is this: What the emperors, who pretend to be gods, illegitimately claim, really occurs here — a message endowed with plenary authority, a message that is not just talk, but reality.²

“The time is fulfilled,” Jesus says, “and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” It’s good news because Jesus says so. It’s good news because in his saying of it, it becomes true. The realm of heaven is coming, has come. Jesus’ good news demands not simply that we believe what he says but that we live like it matters. The kingdom Jesus preached about must be lived into existence by us.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reminds us that, “Today *we* stand between two worlds, a world that is gradually passing away and a world that is being born. We stand between the dying old and the emerging new.”³ And, truth be told, Jesus didn’t intend for us to simply stand between the old and the new. He intended for us to actively work to bring about the new – to realize heaven’s realm in our midst, right here, right now, for all.

² Joseph Ratzinger. *Jesus of Nazareth*, New York: Doubleday, 2007.

³ Martin Luther King, Jr. “The Vision of a World Made New,” 1954.

It's a tall order. And individually, we have little hope of showing the world what the realm of heaven is meant to look like. That's why we have each other. That's why we have the church. Together, we can manifest heaven's realm in our midst, casting a vision of what's really possible in the world when people transcend that which divides and unite our hearts and our hands to build that which is truly possible.

2,000 years ago, Jesus' message was urgent. God knows, it still is. Let's work together to show our community and our world what heaven's realm can truly look like.

May it be so. Amen.