

Devotions – January 24-30, 2021
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Sunday January 24, 2021

Text: Mark 1:16-20

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.

New Revised Standard Version

God calls us. Every real hope we have begins with that.

They were busy at the time; Simon, Andrew, James and John. They were commercial fishermen. That was how they expected to spend their lives. They may have heard something about this new preacher, Jesus, but there’s no evidence they thought what he said made any difference in their lives. Until he called them. And that is where the change in their lives began.

Jesus said once, “You did not choose me but I chose you” (John 15:16). This was true for his apostles, and it is true for us, for you and me. Our life with Christ begins with his call. That is part of what “grace” means – God calls us because of God’s love, which is not based on anything we bring.

I am deeply grateful for this. God’s love, God’s grace – these things are strong and can be trusted. God calls us. Every hope begins with that.

Let us pray: *Almighty God, by grace alone you call us; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*



Monday January 25, 2021

Text: Mark 1:14-15

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.”

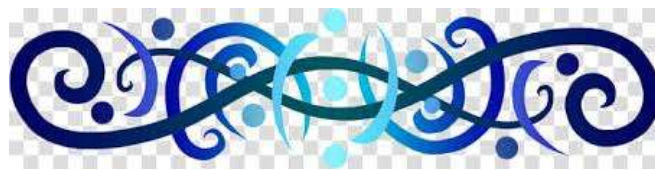
NRSV

Sunday’s Gospel reading continues with a summary of the gospel Jesus proclaimed. We need a better translation: “good news” doesn’t cover it. The gospel is not happy talk. It’s too easy to reduce the gospel to what makes us feel comfortable. Which wouldn’t necessarily have much to do with the call of God on which our hope depends.

In the time Mark wrote, the word we sometimes translate “gospel” was usually used for important official announcements: proclamations, Imperial edicts, Imperial holidays declared. In our day, “platform” or “manifesto” might come close; “a public declaration of intentions.” What is it, when Jesus comes, that God intends?

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent...” God is about to act, in ways we have not seen before. Our world will change. Our future is different now. Nets and old comfort will be left behind, for a hope we had not imagined.

Let us pray: Almighty God, by grace alone make us worthy of your call, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.



Tuesday January 26, 2021

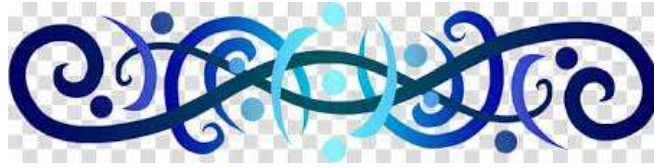
Text: Psalm 62:5-7 ELW

**For God alone I wait in silence; truly, my hope is in God.
God alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold,
so that I shall never be shaken.**

Let’s look for the gospel in last Sunday’s Psalm. Jesus began his work by declaring the Kingdom of God. What is this? In the Gospels, the Kingdom is a power. The kingly power of God, by which our future and our world are changed. It is not a “someday, somewhere” thing. God is at work, here and now, and in our world. Often unseen, unrecognized, but powerful. Every healing miracle of Jesus declares the presence of that Kingdom, every time he faced and defeated the powers of evil, every time he broke the grip of sin and guilt. God is among us. Our world is changing.

What does it mean, then, to believe this declaration? The Psalmist already understood what it would be: to place our hope in God. Not our own virtue. Not power, or wisdom. “For God alone I wait.”

Let us pray: *Almighty God, by grace alone strengthen us by your Spirit, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*



Wednesday January 27, 2021

Text: Psalm 62:9-12a ELW

Those of high degree are but a fleeting breath; those of low estate cannot be trusted. Placed on the scales together they weigh even less than a breath.

Put no trust in extortion; in robbery take no empty pride; though wealth increase, set not your heart upon it.

God has spoken once, twice have I heard it, that power belongs to God.

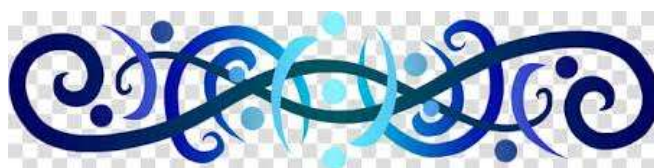
All human power and wealth and wisdom passes away. God's intention is that you and I should be eternal. What's worth having then? What matters – really?

If it is true – if we believe – that in Jesus the kingdom of God has come near, and that he shall reign forever, then the values of that kingdom are what matter. They will stand firm. Everything else will pass away, often sooner than we expected. Which is a gift from God to celebrate. Jesus said,

“You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Mark 10:42-45

We've seen too many tyrants, using wealth or power to dominate others. There's an old proverb: “When the elephants fight, it's the grass that suffers.” We've seen too many children starved for someone else's glory. It's time to honor that no longer. For the Son of Man came. And where God's kingdom comes, these evils cannot stand. Now we have seen another way. Turn around. Change your mind. Believe.

Let us pray: *Almighty God, by grace lead us to trust your kingdom and give us strength to act as people who believe that your kingdom comes; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*



Thursday January 28, 2021

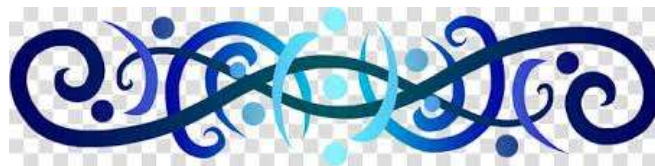
Text: Jonah 3:4-5, 10

Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. ... When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. NRSV

What does it mean to repent? The word the Gospels use is *metanoia*, to change your mind, turn in a new direction. It can include being sorry for sin, but that's just the surface. "The people of Nineveh believed God ... they turned from their evil ways." Now, those "evil ways" were truly evil. And Nineveh was proud of them. Archaeologists have found the wall carvings which decorated the palace in Nineveh, and you can see them in the British Museum in London. They are a celebration of cruelty and merciless power. Tent villages thrown down and burning, whole cities destroyed and their people marched off into slavery, dead bodies on the ground while Nineveh's triumphant kings march through. Grim, and evil. As we see when this book of the Bible goes on, Jonah was bitterly angry when "God changed his mind" and the city was not destroyed. These were the people who trampled Israel with bloody feet, who carried the people off to exile. He'd have loved to see them get what they had coming.

The kingdom of God, however, works in a different way. As my grandmother used to say, "If we all got what we deserved, who'd escape hanging?" As God's morning dawns and the world is transformed around us, it matters less where we stand than where we're facing. Turn from darkness toward the light. Turn in a new direction. Change your mind.

Let us pray: *Lord God, your love is always more than we expect. Summon us into your light, and direct our steps in the ways of goodness to which your kingdom calls us; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen*



Friday January 29, 2021

Text: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though

they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

NRSV

These are strange, uncomfortable words. The apostle Paul's letters are often difficult. But if we wrestle with them, they invite us to a depth of understanding of the message of Jesus which we might otherwise have missed. So Paul comes at the meaning of repentance from a different direction. "As though they had none." What's this about? When all the world is changing in God's hands, it makes no sense to live as if nothing were changed. We understand this in time of natural disasters. When the floods or wildfires come, you evacuate. House, possessions, work – what seemed important yesterday is left behind. Pile family and dogs in the car and run.

The gospel calls us to understand hope in a similar way. "The present form of this world is passing away." It reminds me of a Beatles song: "I'm taking the time for a number of things that weren't important yesterday." Take time for compassion. Take time for hope. There's other things which try to claim our attention: self-importance, profit, power in this world, having people pay attention to us. Perhaps they seemed important "yesterday," before the kingly power of God drew near. Before the fires of the gospel began to burn away old wickedness. Repentance asks: what is important now?

Let us pray: *Blessed Lord God, you have given the holy scriptures for the nourishment of your people. Grant that we may embrace and forever hold fast to the hope you set before us, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*



Saturday January 30, 2021

Text: 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.

NRSV

Let's turn to last Sunday's Gospel once more. What are the promises to which this week has called us?

God is among us. Jesus is more than a teacher. He is God present in our world; he is our clearest vision of what the compassion of God can mean.

Something new is happening. “The time is fulfilled.” God has made a world in which things *happen*, there is change and it means something. Across the centuries God has been working for our healing; and now a major tipping point has come. You and I live within that tipping point. Our world is changing in God’s hands.

“The kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe...” And there’s the change. It’s easy for our attention to be captured by other powers, old bitter ways rooted in the brokenness of our world and our lives. They may have once seemed inescapable. But *now* – look toward the light. Compassion, hope, trust toward God and caring for each other – these are the new ways. Yes, they are born in struggle. The old defeated bitter powers would like to drag us back into their grip. And we have seen them at the Cross. But we have also seen a stone that’s rolled away. And Jesus lives.

Let us pray: *Almighty God, by grace alone you call us and accept us in your service. Strengthen us by your Spirit, and make us worthy of your call, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

