

“Follow Me, the Kingdom of God is coming”

Rev. Erika Martinez-Flores

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Westby UMC & Viroqua UMC

Yes, the gospel is the content of Christian proclamation, the good news of liberation for humanity by God through Jesus, and the gospel according to Mark is the first narrative that has reached us.

The opening with the expression “beginning of the gospel,” start with a happy announcement, like a living voice, thus pouring it into the form of a life story. The first phrase also specifies that the gospel is that of Jesus Christ, Son of God.

The first part of Mark's gospel, 1:16-8:38, takes place in Galilee. It begins with Jesus' call to the first disciples. The second part of the gospel covers the last seven chapters, the road to Jerusalem, which includes the three announcements of the passion, and which has usually been considered the starting point of what it means to follow Jesus.

The text that requires our attention today begins with the arrest of John, which will culminate in his violent death chapters later, giving rise to Jesus' proclamation: “The time has come and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the gospel!” (v. 15). Mark is right to see John's arrest as the turning point in which Jesus' ministry begins.

Nothing suggests that John had committed a crime: “John baptized in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” He was also not someone with money and political power: “John was dressed in camel's hair, had a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey.” John's crime was his words against the conquering power. Every corrupt power seeks to silence and even kill people who raise their voices against their actions.

The v. 15 summarizes Jesus' entire message and is central to his teaching. The expression “the Kingdom of God appears in the mouth of Jesus in Mark on twelve other occasions (4:11.26.30; 9:1.47; 10:14-15.23-25; 12:34; 14:25). The meaning of this expression in Mark refers to Isaiah 52:7. If we look between the lines we can realize that Jesus' message is a continuation of the message that John preached.

John preached against those who used power to satisfy their own desires and needs, and Jesus speaks in favor of those who suffer the consequences of those actions, bringing them hope of peace and salvation as a consequence of the restoration of the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, those who are willing to follow Jesus have the mission of announcing and showing that coming kingdom of God.

In the following verses we see this first scene of calling disciples. Jesus walks near the Sea of Galilee and encounters fishermen casting nets on the seashore. What is striking is the fact that the story is presented from the point of view of the fishermen who see Jesus passing by. Thanks to the narrator we learn their names and their relationship, followed by the invitation to “come after me” to make them “fishers of men.”

This story gives us a portrait of discipleship. Discipleship involves abiding with Jesus and participating in his mission. The call for Andrew and Simon (whom Mark mentions many times; more than Luke and Matthew), is to become disciples and preachers of the kingdom of God, to which they respond quickly, abandoning the networks.

After his first public pronouncement (vv. 14-15), Jesus calls first Simon and Andrew and then James and John and makes them participants in his ministry (vv. 16-20). The disciples will not only accompany Jesus, but he will allow them to share in his ministry and eventually continue it. Mark places these fishermen with Jesus, from the beginning, as witnesses and participants in his ministry.

Jesus announced the eschatological coming of the kingdom of God, “the time is fulfilled” which can be interpreted as the full manifestation of God in the person of Jesus himself. That is why we are daily exhorted to Come on, come! Let us participate, together with Jesus, in the adventure of spreading the powerful life-transforming message.

The announcement of the good news, which Jesus makes today, requires listeners and people who actively collaborate. You must accept the invitation. The call of the fishermen to follow Jesus as disciples receives a positive, immediate and committed response.

These fishermen left everything, their boats, families, professions, their “Galilee” to embark on a different adventure that transformed their lives. Likewise, each of us, as baptized, are called to grow in God's grace, responding with obedience to his daily call. In recognition that “The appointed time has come, and the kingdom of God is at hand,” we are called to produce works of conversion and commitment, knowing that God himself lives among us. Amen.