

## 17 January 2021 – The good news



Time seems to control so much of our lives.

Breakfast time, lunchtime, dinnertime, bedtime ...

Worktime, leisure time, church time ...

10 am on Sunday morning ...

There are also bigger divisions of time ... months and seasons that determine what

we do and even how we feel about life ...

All of these times are set by clocks or the stars or perhaps by nature. In Greek language, this type of time is called **chronos time**, from which we get the word chronometer or watch.

But there's another type of time altogether that has nothing to do with clocks. In Greek it's called **kairos time** ... like the first time you met your lifetime partner. Or the time a child is born or a person dies. Or the time you sense God is saying something important in your life ... It's the God appointed time that the book of Ecclesiastes speaks about.

Mark's Gospel story is filled with **kairos** times. Such as the time when John the Baptist is arrested, which marks the time for Jesus to begin his public ministry. So Jesus comes from Nazareth to Galilee and announces that the time – the **kairos** time – has been fulfilled. Each of the four Gospel stories follows this same pattern. Jesus' ministry begins after the arrest of John and with the calling of the first disciples.



The word **fulfilled** also carries significance. It indicates that a promise or prophecy, a purpose, hope or desire has been fulfilled or come to pass. It's a bit like the line in the Christmas carol, *O little town of Bethlehem ... the hopes and fears of all the years are met in you tonight*. For those versed in the Hebrew Scriptures – what we call the Old Testament – the prophetic hopes are that God would send a deliverer to rescue and restore Israel, to usher in the true reign of God.

Here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Mark is claiming that this hope, this *kairos* time is coming to pass in the arrival of Jesus in the public domain.

This is **God's time** ... as Jesus comes to Galilee proclaiming the **good news** of God. Jesus calls on people to repent and trust in the **good news**.

This is the same word **euaggelion** that Mark uses in the opening verse of his story – the beginning of the **good news** of Jesus Christ. We also translate this word as **Gospel**. So the whole of Mark's story is to be regarded as good news.

*Euaggelion*  
Good NEWS

In Jewish culture, the term 'good news' comes from several verses in the prophetic book of Isaiah that speak of a messenger bringing good news of God's promise to rescue the people from slavery in Babylon and bring them back to their own country. God would act to bring freedom and restoration ...

*Climb up a high mountain, Zion.*

*You're the preacher of good news.*

*Raise your voice. Make it good and loud...*

*Tell the cities of Judah,*

*"Look! Here is your God!"*

*Look! God is coming in power, ready to go into action. (Isa 40:9-10)*

*How beautiful on the mountains*

*are the feet of the one bringing good news,*

*telling the news that all's well, announcing salvation,*

*telling Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isa 52:7)*

Here at the start of Jesus' public ministry, he is announcing something similar. God's kingdom has come near. The time of God's reign has come.

Repent and turn back to God. Believe in the good news that God is coming to bring freedom and restoration and hope.

So it's an **old message** but also a **new message**, centered on the person and ministry of Jesus. According to Mark, this message of good news about God's kingdom lay at the heart of Jesus' ministry. **But what is this good news? Here**

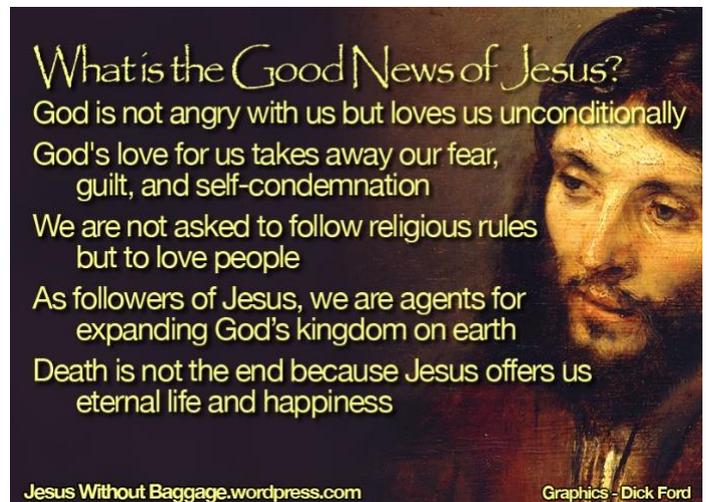
**is one person's understanding.** It would be an interesting exercise to go home and try to write down in a sentence or two, what you understand by the terms 'good news' and 'kingdom of God'. And then to compare your answer with Mark's telling of the Jesus story.

Mark's way of story-telling is to

**show** us rather than to **tell** us what this good news is all about. So just in the first couple of chapters, Mark will sketch out stories of Jesus freeing people from evil spiritual forces, healing and restoring people to community, and confronting the hypocrisy of some who want to limit where and how God may act. Many people are amazed and astounded at Jesus. Others find this good news too scary or too disturbing to embrace.

But Mark invites us on a journey of discovery with Jesus and invites us to draw our own conclusions. As I shared in the latest newsletter, we're going to hear the whole story of Mark over the next couple of months leading up the Easter, week by week. Instead of following the normal Lectionary readings through Lent we'll be hearing the Jesus story from start to finish. So I hope you're up for the challenge!

After the summary statement of Jesus' mission and purpose, the first thing Jesus does is call disciples. This priority is recorded in each of the four Gospel stories. So making disciples or forming disciples is no Plan B when things don't go right for Jesus – it's Plan A from the very beginning. And it marks Jesus out as different from other prophets before him, including John the



Baptist. Jesus is never a solo operator but from the very beginning is building a new **community**, a **movement** of people, a renewed **people of God**.

And so the **shape** of Jesus' ministry will be focused on two things ... proclaiming and enacting the good news and forming disciples who can carry on his ministry when he is no longer around.

What a wonderful initial selection Jesus makes! Four fishermen – Simon (later called Peter), his brother Andrew, and two other brothers James and John ... and later, by the way, many women too ... Now we might have chosen a different crew to build a new movement around – perhaps choosing people with better **connections** or at least some **prior experience** in the role or a few relevant **skills**.



But Jesus clearly had different criteria than we often apply. These four were **plain ordinary folk**. Nothing special. As the story unfolds we'll see that they were often slow to understand Jesus, they made mistakes, they got into trouble by saying the wrong thing sometimes, they could be exceedingly stupid and frustrating ... in other words, **they're a lot like us!** ...

A little detective work suggests that we can be fairly sure that the portrayal of the disciples is accurate even if it's unflattering. You'll notice that Simon Peter is the first disciple named in verse 16 of chapter 1 and he's also the last disciple to feature in this Gospel, two verses from the end of the story, after the resurrection of Jesus. Hence the long held view that this Gospel of Mark is based on the **personal eyewitness memories** of Peter, and that Mark travelled with Peter and heard him preach on many occasions and then translated these messages into Greek. So what we have in Mark's Gospel is Peter's recollections of what Jesus said and did from the very beginning of his ministry.

Mark's story tells us that the four fishermen **immediately** left their boats, their family, their homes and their fishing business and followed Jesus. All I can say is that Jesus must have been very **persuasive** to get such a response. Jesus it seems was not merely someone **interesting** to listen to – but someone to give up **everything** for and **follow**. That's uncomfortable for us. It's **edgy**. It's **radical**. Perhaps there's a backstory of some sort of relationship or friendship already established – like the one we find in John's Gospel – but even so this was a major step to take.



What did Jesus see when Jesus looked at the fishermen?

I think he saw people of **courage**, **potential** and **perseverance**. He saw people he could **equip** so that they could take over the new movement when he was no longer there. As older folk, one of our callings might be to deliberately look out for people who will take over the mantle of leadership from us.

While most of us probably feel most comfortable sticking with the fishing nets we know and the habits we've grown accustomed to, Jesus calls to us to follow him into **new places** and to try **new things** ... which is both the **exciting** and the **scary** part of following Jesus ... as the initial disciples found out.

Let me finish with a prayer from Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann:

You are the God who calls people like us,  
and the long list of others before us,  
who trusted your promise enough to keep the call.

So we give you thanks that you are a calling God,  
who calls us to dangerous new places.

We pray enough of your grace and mercy among us  
that we may be among those who believe your promises  
enough to respond to your call.

We pray in the name of the one who embodied your promise  
and enacted your call, Jesus. Amen.