

YOUR PLANE WILL BE BOARDING SOON  
Rev. Jason Santalucia

A sermon preached at Valley Presbyterian Church  
in Brookfield, Connecticut  
on January 21, 2024

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.

**F**or such a short passage, the gospel reading today is a real challenge. First of all, there's so much going on. In the first two verses alone, we hear about the arrest of John the Baptist, the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, and the message he was preaching. Mark really knows how to pack it in.

Second of all, the message itself—"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news"—is one of those lines in scripture that's so familiar it goes in one ear and out the other. But the more you think about it, the more questions you have. What time is fulfilled? If the kingdom of God is near, where is it? How does someone repent? And what is the good news we're supposed to believe?

So between Mark's super dense writing style and Jesus trying to describe something that can't easily be put into words, this is a really hard passage to wrap your head around. But let's give it a shot because if we can get a better handle on this passage, we can get a better handle on the whole gospel.

**L**et's start with an analogy. Imagine a crowded airport with thousands of people all going to different places. Above all the noise a voice comes over the loudspeaker: "Flight 362 is now arriving at gate 23. Will passengers holding tickets for New York please go to gate 23. Your plane will be boarding soon." Now, some people are talking on their phones or watching a movie, and they don't even hear the announcement. Other people hear it, but they're not going to New York, so they don't pay any attention.

A few people, however, immediately perk up because that's their flight number. So as soon as the announcement is over, they get their boarding passes out, gather up their belongings and start heading to gate 23.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus' message is just like that announcement, except he's not talking about a flight that will soon be boarding. He's talking about a new day that will soon be dawning—a day that his listeners have been waiting for for a long time. He's telling them that that day is no longer way off in the future. It's here. It's on the ground. It's parked at the gate. So they need to get up, get ready, and go meet it. They need to start living into this new reality that's upon them.

Now, keep that overview in mind, and let's go through the sermon bit by bit.

**T**he first thing Jesus says is that the time is fulfilled, and what he means is, his appearance marks a turning point in the story of God's relationship with humankind. Him showing up in Galilee is the moment when God is stepping into human history in a unique and decisive way.

And I don't know what was so special about Galilee two-thousand years ago. It was just a sleepy little backwater. But that was when and where God chose to enter the world and bring in a new age. It's like, Why did the tree that stood in the forest for a thousand years fall down on a

certain day? Because that was the day it fell down.

The next thing Jesus says is that the kingdom of God has come near. Which means it's close, but it's not yet a full-blown reality. It's still becoming. It's still unfolding. And that's exactly what we see in the course of the gospel. We see the kingdom unfolding in the lives of people Jesus encounters. We see people experiencing the power of God in Jesus' words and deeds, and in those experiences the kingdom is present—at least partially. It's like something you can only see out of the corner of your eye. It's there, but you can't look at it directly. It's real, but you can't make out all the details.

**S**o Jesus starts out his sermon with a two-fold announcement, telling people what's happening: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near." Then he follows up with a two-fold appeal, telling them what they need to do about it: "Repent, and believe in the good news." So, let's take these one at a time.

What does it mean, first of all, to repent? Well, we usually think it means feeling really, really bad about something we've done and promising to never do it again. But that's not what repentance is about. It doesn't have anything to do with guilt or shame. Literally what it means to repent is to stop going in the direction you're going, turn around, and start going in a new direction. It means

---

<sup>1</sup> Lamar Williamson, Jr., *Mark, Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox P., 1983), 43.

making a clean break with the past, changing how you live, and going forward into a new future.

That's what Jesus is telling us to do.

We've been living for as long as anyone can remember in the reality of sin—the reality of our estrangement from God and all the pain and suffering that comes from that brokenness. But a new reality, a new paradigm, a new consciousness is about to emerge, and sin is going to be a thing of the past. Where there was estrangement, there will be reconciliation. Where there was pain and suffering, there will be healing and peace. So what we need to do, Jesus is saying, is respond to that change by living into it. And we shouldn't sit around waiting for it to happen and then try to catch up. We should be proactive. We should start living into it now. We should stop going the way we've been going forever and ever, turn our lives around, and start going in this new direction that Jesus calls the kingdom of God, this new direction that he embodies, this new direction that people can see and feel when they're around him.

Then, Jesus says, what we need to do is believe in the good news—and this is where it gets a little bit tricky.

**T**he good news he's talking about is the two-fold announcement he just made, and believing in the good news means knowing in your gut, in the core of your being, that these things really are true. The time really is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God

really has come near. Which sounds easy enough, but how do we actually do that? How do we reach that level of absolute certainty?

Well, typically we have to experience something before we can really believe in it, right? And the way we experience the kingdom of God is by repenting—by turning toward it and embracing it. That's what makes it real to us. But the thing is, it's hard to embrace something until you know it and trust it. So, it's like, which came first, the chicken or the egg? It's hard to believe until we repent. But it's hard to repent until we believe.

What are we supposed to do, then? How do we find our way out of this dilemma? The answer, I think, is right here in the rest of the reading, where Jesus calls his first disciples.

**W**hat always strikes me about this scene is how, when Jesus comes walking along and says, "Follow me," the disciples respond without hesitation. They leave behind their livelihoods, their homes, their families, without even asking any questions. Follow you where? To do what? They're like people sitting in an airport, waiting for a flight. When they hear the announcement that their plane will be boarding soon, they just get up and go. Because the sound of that voice makes it real for them. They're no longer sitting in an airport, waiting for a flight. They're on a trip. They're on their way to New York. It's actually happening.

In the same way, the sound of Jesus' voice, makes it real for the disciples. His preaching and his presence manifest the kingdom of

God for them in that moment. They're no longer in Galilee, fishing and mending their nets. They're no longer in the world they've known all their lives. They're in the world God is unfolding, right then and there.

And so are we. Every time we hear Jesus' voice in scripture, every time we feel his presence in our lives, the kingdom of God becomes a present reality for us—at least partially, like something we can see out of the corner of our eye.

So we don't have to worry about how to do what Jesus is telling us to do in this sermon. We just have to seek him out in all the ways that we can and trust that through our relationship with him, our lives will be changed, and in the core of our being we'll know it. Amen.