

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday from December 10, 2023

“Mark's Christmas Gospel”

“The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ the Son of God.”

Mark 1:1

Good News. We so need to hear some good news.

Some days you don't even want to turn on the news because it hurts so much. You have to gird your loins just to watch all the destruction and pain happening in our world.

But at church, we gather because we need to hear the good news of God's love and presence with us even in times of despair. Sadly, we get so much garbage funneling into our brains through the choices we make through our eyes and ears. But what we really need to hear is the good news of a God who created us, who redeemed us, and who sustains us. That is the Gospel. The good news. Euangellion in the original Greek language of the New Testament. It's where we get the word evangelism. To be an evangelical church means that we are a good news church. We proclaim the good news of Jesus found in his life, death, and resurrection every time we gather.

Did you know that Mark 1:1 is Mark's version of the Christmas story. Mark, the earliest Gospel written, has no birth narrative, No Bethlehem, no manger, no baby Jesus, no shepherds keeping watch by night. Only Matthew and Luke have birth narratives. Mark in typical Mark fashion skips all that and jumps right into the gospel with this one-line prologue.

Mark's Gospel reminds me of Wisconsin comedian Charlie Behren's when he says, “Let's keep'er movin.” And he does. Mark uses the word immediately 28 times in the Gospel.

What you read from here on out will be good news. Even when Jesus suffers and dies on the cross, Mark is saying, remember this is good news for you and for the world.

But in order to hear that good news, John the Baptist calls to people out to the wilderness to receive a baptism for the forgiveness of sins to prepare the way of the Lord. He says, repent, for the Kingdom of God

is at hand. What things are you doing or not doing that are putting a roadblock to your heart and prevent you from hear the good news of Jesus? Well, our God, our great excavator, who makes mountains low and valleys lifted will make a path to your heart. Through the word and sacraments and the work of the Holy Spirit, you will be changed.

The good news tonight from our first lesson is that God wants the prophet Isaiah to comfort, comfort my people who are in exile, people who are hurting, or who have experienced great loss, who have been displaced. I can't but help to think of all the people in Gaza right now who are displaced or are hostages... who have no say or power in what happens to them. Our God of justice will and must work through anyone on the outside with ears to hear or eyes to see in order to level the playing field to provide aid and bring people home again.

Our Gospel proclaims that one who is more powerful than John the Baptist will come and save the world. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. This one did come and will come again. He will show up in our wilderness places, our places of exile, our places of loss and pain, our moments we have messed up, and redeem us.

The cross will be good news to us always. Amen