

If you were to summarize all of Jesus' teachings, life, and mission down to a single thesis statement, what would that statement be? I ask that question often to groups of people, and the responses I generally receive back are things like: God is love, forgiveness, and the Golden Rule.

Those are all okay answers. But the problem I see with those types of answers is that they don't really seem to be aligned with the reactions we see from Jesus' life and teaching. Consider the examples that we will talk about in the text today. "At once they left their nets and followed him" (Mark 1:18). Jesus walks up after having preached his central message, and these men immediately left everything they knew to follow Jesus. "...and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him" (Mark 1:20b).

What is it that provoked these guys to immediately leave their life of stability and follow Jesus? What is it about this message of Jesus that drives people to upend their life for something different?

Consider another example from the Gospel of Luke. Jesus' public ministry is just getting underway. He is in the synagogue and is getting up to preach in front of the crowd gathered there. Jesus takes up the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and turns to a section that is all about the Kingdom of God. He reads from that section and, "He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'" (Luke 4:21). Essentially declaring that the Kingdom of God had arrived.

The response to this sermon was the crowd, and the religious leaders became so stirred up that they drove him out of town to the edge of a cliff and tried to throw him off the side. What is it about the message of Jesus that provokes such responses? What is it about Jesus' "thesis statement" of his mission that provoked such a strong reaction?

Each of the synoptic gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—each present at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry this similar phrase as the central message of Jesus' life, ministry, and teaching.

Announcement of the Gospel

"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'" (Mark 1:14-15). This statement, this short paragraph, is

the thesis statement of all of Jesus' teaching, ministry, and mission. Let me say it one more time; clearly, this right here is the central message of Jesus. "The time has come; the Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

The phrase "Kingdom of God" or "Kingdom of Heaven" is used 126 times in the gospels alone. These references and these mentions of the "Kingdom of God" are all over the New Testament and the four gospels. This is the overwhelmingly central message of not only the four gospels but the whole of the New Testament.

Mark is careful to mention that John was put into prison. This is a foreshadowing of the trouble that Jesus, too, would arouse, for John was preaching a gospel that was based on the preparation of the coming Messiah. But Jesus' message was that the Kingdom of God had arrived in him. This message of preparation from John and the Gospel of Jesus' message was a message of disruption that ultimately landed John in prison and will go on to cost Jesus his life. Whatever this gospel is, it is a dangerous gospel. It is one that threatens the status quo and puts on tilt those in power.

But for those in need, for those trapped under the boot of the status quo, this gospel is the radical reorientation of the world, bringing about the longings and hopes of generation on generation of God's people. This is why Mark uses the language of "gospel" or, as translated here, "the good news of God."

The Good News = euangelion = Gospel

A few weeks ago, when I opened our series in the Gospel of Mark, we talked about this word, euangelion, or what we translate as gospel. Literally, it is an announcement. It is a proclamation about a thing that has happened and is being brought to bear on reality now. For the first century audience, it was a political word that would have struck their ears about a preacher from Nazareth speaking about a different kind of euangelion. A new kind of gospel, not of Caesar but of the Kingdom of God.

For all of our familiarity with the way we speak about this word gospel, it is really important that we get clear on what the gospel is. So the natural question that I hope you are asking yourself is, "What is the euangelion of Jesus?" Well, he goes on to say exactly what it is, "The time has come, the Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

This for Jesus and for Mark is clearly the gospel message. This can be broken down into two simple sections. The Announcement

and the Call to Respond. I want us to look at each of these, in turn, this morning, and then we'll close our time by looking at this gospel in action as Jesus will go on to call his first disciples to this gospel.

The Announcement

"The time has come...the kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15a). What does Jesus mean when he says, "the time has come"? Well, if we are going to get at what Jesus means by this phrase, we have to understand that in Greek, there are three words for the English word "time": *aiōn* meaning prolonged time, eternity, an age, or epoch; *chronos* meaning where get our word chronological time, a definite period of time, or an indefinite time, but about one thing after another; and *kairos* meaning time in terms of a significant event coming to pass. Think when someone goes into labor, "It's time," *kairos*.

The word used in Mark 1:15 is the last word, *kairos*. And the reason it is very important is because Jesus' announcement of the arrival of the Kingdom of God is not simply that the chronological moment has come, but rather, the culmination of a much larger story has arrived.

So what "time" was it? And why had the "time" come? Well, as we have discussed a couple of times over, Jesus and the arrival of the Kingdom of God was what the Jewish 1st Century person longed and hoped for!

God's people had been held captive to the hopes that the Kingdom of God would one day arrive and liberate God's people from the oppression of Rome and other kingdoms. The longing for God's kingdom had dominated the Jewish culture for the many centuries that preceded the arrival of Jesus and his announcement of the Kingdom of God.

So when he arrives and declares, "The Kingdom of God has come near," the question that would have been asked was not, "What does this mean?" but rather, "Is this true? Is Jesus really the long-awaited Messiah sent from God?"

The arrival of God's kingdom was good news for the oppressed, but as we will see with the hostility of the religious and political elites of Jesus' day, it will also come with suspicion among those seated in power. This is partly why Mark opens Jesus' announcement about the arrival of the Kingdom of God with a note of John's arrest. So if the time has come, what has the time given way for? Jesus goes on, "The Kingdom of God has come near..."

Kingdom of God

As McKenna alluded to briefly in the message last week, we have a hard time with the idea of a kingdom. It is not something we naturally understand. But as this is the central message and preaching of Jesus, it would serve us well to understand, as best we can, what Jesus means by the Kingdom of God.

The basic way that we can understand this phrase is it is God's rule or God's reign. The Kingdom of God is most basically an understanding of a king ruling in a place, and that place is the king's domain. This is built into the very etymology of the word.

Let's break down the word kingdom so we can understand more clearly. The word is comprised of two parts, the first, "king," and then the suffix, "-dom." And the suffix -dom is connected to the idea of domain. Therefore, the idea of the king-dom is the domain in which the king rules. We see this all over the English language. Consider the following examples:

Bore-dom - The domain where one is bored.

Star-dom - The domain of being a star, famous, or exceptional.

King-dom - The domain in which the king rules.

So fundamentally, a kingdom is the place in which a king is actively ruling. The Kingdom of God could be translated as the space in which the rule and reign of God is taking place. The idea is that it is God's rulership. The connotation is one of an active rulership. Not something that is removed from our lives today, nor is it something outside of time and space. It is about what God is doing right here and now.

It should be noted that one of the common misconceptions about the Kingdom of God is that it is heaven or what is usually thought of as life after death. But that is not accurate. And when we assert that the Kingdom of God is life after death, we miss the reality that what God has done in the work of Jesus has deep implications in the here and now.

So what is meant by the Kingdom of God? Another writer says the Kingdom of God is the "range of God's effective will" (Willard). This definition is built off of Jesus' own definition of the Kingdom of God, which is a pretty good place to start in understanding the definition.

Flip over to Matthew 6, where Jesus is teaching his disciples to pray and offers this familiar line:

"your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). Jesus is using a familiar literary device called parallelism that is utilized to expound and emphasize what is being repeated. It is a way of saying the exact same thing but in two different ways in order to elaborate and expound our understanding. So when Jesus says, "your kingdom come," the immediate next line is an elaboration of the prior line, "your will be done." The Kingdom of God, therefore, is the space where God's will is done. Where what God wants to have happen happens.

This could play out in a family, a food pantry, a small group, a friendship, a school, a community garden, or a city. It is a space where God is on the throne, and God is exercising his power, authority, and will. It is the place where heaven and earth overlap in the here and now.

Here is the primary and main difference between heaven and earth. Heaven is God-space; it is the space in which God's will is always done and brought to bear in the world. It is not a distant place out there but is the invisible space or dimension in which we see God's will being done actively.

Earth, on the other hand, is the dimension of life that we currently inhabit, where God's will is not always happening. Sometimes it is happening, but not always because there are other kingdoms at play. There are other kings and kingdoms; there is my will and your will, which at times aligns with God's, but many times it does not align with God's will. This creates the sort of clash of kingdoms that we see wreaking havoc all over the world.

These various kingdoms and wills are literally at war with one another because their vision of life does not match God's vision of the good life or the flourishing shalom-saturated life that he is bringing about through the Kingdom of God.

As I've talked about before, we live in the overlap between the kingdom of earth and the kingdom of heaven. And there is coming a day when "Christ is all in all" (Col. 3:11), where the earth is fully saturated with heaven. But when Jesus comes onto the scene and announces that this Kingdom has come near, he is saying that the bifurcation between heaven and earth is changing. What was once hoped to come in the future has been ripped from the future and brought into the present. God's rule has come near; it is breaking into the present; it is here.

has come near...

We have to be careful with how we understand this phrase. This isn't speaking about chronology, like coming in time in the future, but is speaking spatially. It is near in proximity. Think more like when you are traveling on a road trip of sorts, and you're approaching your destination. It is here; it has arrived; it is near! The phrase can be translated as "imminent" or arriving, or "is within reach."

Last Christmas, we took a marathon road trip up to my in-law's place in Montana. Christmas day, we set out for what is normally a 15-hour drive, which we have done a few times over. Well, if you remember, this past Christmas, it was the day a record-breaking storm blew into the area, but we persevered. It was a nightmare! We left Christmas day, got stuck in the snow at the summit for hours, then had to turn all the way around at 11 pm and head for Sacramento and up to Redding to try getting to Montana that route. After spending 13 hours in the car just getting to Redding, we woke up the next day after a few hours of sleep and went north through Oregon, bypassing Nevada. We then got stuck in another blizzard-like conditions in the middle of Oregon, where we had to grab one of the last hotel rooms available in a tiny town in the middle of Oregon. We finally made it out the next day, where we drove all day to find our way to my

in-laws. All in all, it took 36 hours of just drive time to get there! A nightmare.

But, somewhere along the way, after the one-millionth question asking if we were there yet, I was finally able to say, "Dillon Montana is near!" It is imminent, it is present and available, and all we have to do is drive further there. The Kingdom of Dillon Montana is near, at hand, imminent.

The phrase can be translated as "imminent" or arriving, or "is within reach." So too, Jesus is saying, the kingdom of God is right here, available to be entered into right here, right now. This is what Jesus is driving toward and getting at. The Kingdom of God is present and at-hand, ready to be entered into.

This is the announcement of the gospel, the central message of Jesus, "The time has come, the kingdom of God has come near..." What do we do to this announcement? How do we respond to this announcement? Well, this is the second part of Jesus' central message, the call to respond.

The Call to Respond

"Repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15b). So how do we respond to this gospel announcement of Jesus? Well, that is simple. Jesus tells us we are to do two things: repent and believe. Now, we have to do some work on these two words because these are really familiar "churchy" words that are prone to lose their meaning due to familiarity.

Repent

What does it mean to repent? The Greek word used for repent is the word *metanoēō*, which is a compound word constructed from the prefix, *meta*, meaning to change or renew/restore. Think of the English word *metamorphosis*. And then the second part of the word is the Greek word *noēō*, which means think, perceive, or understand.

So when you put those together, it means rethinking or changing your thinking. It could be translated, "Think about the world in a whole new way!" Jesus' call to respond in repentance is that we are to come to the realization that God is up to something in the universe, and our life is meant to be reorganized, re-ordered, to live into that reality here and now. Read how New Testament scholar Tim Gombis talks about repentance in the context of Mark.

To repent (*metanoēō*) is to change one's mind, to embrace new thought patterns, to expand the horizons of current thought and behavior, and to imagine the new attitudes, redeemed social practices, and life-giving patterns of behavior that are consistent with inhabiting God's kingdom. - Tim Gombis

To repent is to wrestle with the reality that the in-breaking Kingdom of God requires us to reorient everything from our personal piety, to reimagine our social practices, to give shape to life-giving habits and patterns of behavior that recognize our

futility of living and bring us further into the ordering of the way of Jesus.

It is not simply a preacher's hyperbole, which certainly I have been guilty of before, to say that in light of the arrival of the Kingdom of God, we must rethink every corner of our existence in the light of that reality. Any level of indifference to God and his will must now be abandoned in light of this new ontological reality. Our indifference only serves to keep us from the full life that Jesus came to give us (John 10:10).

N.T. Wright, one of the top scholars on the New Testament in the world right now, translates the text this way..."Give up your agenda and trust me for mine." Because the bottom line is that we all have an agenda; we all have a kingdom; we all are ordering our lives according to some principle and vision of the good life. It is up to us to ensure that we are re-ordering our life around the reality of the Kingdom of God.

So yes, repentance is about saying sorry and feeling guilty about your sin, but it is about so much more. It is about walking away from every single aspect of your life that doesn't align with the reality of the Kingdom of God. It is about giving up anything that is out of sync with the very reality of the Kingdom of God here and now. Repentance is about learning to live, in all aspects of your life, into the eternal kind of life here and now!

It is about understanding that any way in which your life is ordered for this present age is futile because this present age is passing away; it is subject to decay and brokenness. So we give up this present age because a new one is being born; repent and give up your agenda for God's.

Believe

The first call to respond is to repent, to re-order, and rethink every aspect and corner of our lives. But the second call to action is another very familiar word, maybe even more familiar—believe.

The total whole-life reorientation that repentance requires will necessitate an act of "belief or faith," and that is where Jesus goes next. This is why repentance and belief are connected together.

Believe (pisteuó), historically, this word is really difficult to translate and is slippery in our understanding of what is meant by pisteuo. Now, this word can also be translated as faith; maybe better, it can be translated as faithfulness. Matthew Bates wrote a book released in 2017 that argues a better understanding of the word believe or faith would be the idea of "allegiance." We have to understand that this word is far more than mental assent. It is something much more. It involves changing the way we conceive of living so that we order our relationships and plan our days as if the reign of God is a reality and not a pious fantasy.

I have problems with the translation of "believe" because, for a modern westerner, like most of us, we tend to reduce this to a mental activity, and a mental activity alone. I like the concepts of

allegiance, loyalty, or fidelity. This doesn't mean or necessitate perfection. Our allegiances may never be perfected, but the general trajectory of one's life in allegiance to the way of Jesus demonstrates what the concept of faith means and entails turning and trusting, repenting, and giving allegiance to the good news. Trust Jesus as the Lord that he is, and reorganize your life accordingly. This concept of putting our allegiance in the Kingdom of God, requiring us to rethink and lay aside all other allegiances, is the very invitation of following Jesus.

One last thing before we move on from this...both of these verbs, repent and believe, are commands in the present-imperfect tense. All you need to know about that is the imperfect tense is something that has happened and is an ongoing act. It is something that happened once and continues to happen. Meaning, repentance is not a one-time thing that you did forever ago and then never do it again. The people of God are repentance people. We constantly work at giving up our agendas and turning around over and over because that is what we need to constantly reorient our lives to Jesus.

These two verbs—repent and believe—turn around and place your allegiance; these two verbs are the basis of discipleship. The act that we continually take on and live into. The question becomes, whether you are currently a follower of Jesus or are not a follower of Jesus but interested, "What do you need to give up or turn from in order to take up the Kingdom of God?" What is Jesus inviting you to give up, and what pattern of life and/or thought are you being called to set aside to take up the calling of the Kingdom of God?

Because the main point that I want you to understand is this: The Gospel of the Kingdom invites us to lay down our old pattern of living for a new one, consistent with the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

Narrative Response to the Call

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once, they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. Mark 1:16-20

Now, there is so much for us in here about discipleship and the 1st-century context of discipleship, but today we will not be able to get into it. This fall, we are working on some stuff that we are really excited about as we dream and plan for the future of CPC. More to come this fall. But for now, all I want us to see is two things.

First, Jesus called these first disciples, not to a passive role, but to an active role. Jesus' invitation was to follow. More literally,

it was to get behind; it was meant to literally walk behind. Or to walk alongside and take up the very habits, life, and character of Jesus. To follow indicated that “Jesus’s pattern of life and ministry was going to shape their lives comprehensively from now on” (Gombis, Mark).

The invitation of the gospel is not to make some sort of mental assent to a religious doctrine; it is to recognize one’s life is out of step with the in-breaking Kingdom of God, and therefore the orientation of one’s life must be radically altered by the grace and power of God toward a new allegiance!

The phrase “come, follow me” has a tone of “Here, come on!” And the invitation is for those that Jesus is calling to leave any other allegiance and take on a radically new way to live. As scholar R.T. France says it, “[they] are being called to follow Jesus as their leader, in a relationship which went beyond merely formal learning to a full time ‘apprenticeship.’”

Second, and lastly, the response was an immediate response. For the first set of disciples, Simon and Andrew, and also for the Zebedee brothers, the response was immediate. They all dropped their previously constructed lives, habits, and social patterns to take up and learn from the life of Jesus—changing to a life of apprenticeship.

The call of Jesus on the disciples was to leave well-constructed and well-established patterns of life to give him complete allegiance. But this will require a change. This will require a difference in the ways we order our very normal days. It will require a different trajectory, one in which we find our only hope in Jesus.

Call to Repent and Believe

I want to close with two simple questions for all of us. Whether you are currently a follower of Jesus or you were dragged here. Either way, all of us, at some point, will be confronted with the reality of the Kingdom of God breaking into the here and now.

And Jesus’ call to discipleship is vast; it is expansive. The question and the command come to each of us, “Come, follow me.” Come re-order your life around discipleship as a means of apprenticeship to Jesus. This is the invitation.

My question I want to leave you with is, what is Jesus calling you to drop? What identity or allegiance do you hold in competition to Jesus?

Notice that Simon and Andrew’s response to the invitation of Jesus was to drop their nets (their previous identity) and follow Jesus. Notice that the Zebedee brothers left their family business

and took of up the business of Jesus—a radical departure from all they knew about their identity.

The utter beauty of the invitation into the Kingdom of God is that if you want to apprenticeship under Jesus in the school of the eternal life here and now, you are invited to take on the very character of Jesus here and now. And it simply begins with two simple steps—repent and believe.

First, we need to pray and repent. We pray and recognize that our lives are out of step with the in-breaking Kingdom of God, and we will ask God what nets we are holding that we need to drop. We ask what nets we are holding that are competing with our allegiance to Jesus.

Second, how do we “believe” or put our daily ongoing trust in Jesus? There is a lot there in that question, and we are going to dive headlong into that question in the Fall with very practical ways in which we organize our lives around Jesus. But for now, I would invite you into the simple step of following Jesus by spending time with him. Sitting with him in prayer and studying his life. Start in the Gospel of Mark and simply read Jesus’ story over and over and over again. This is how we become familiar with and learn to imitate Jesus as our rabbi.