

Joshua Willadsen
3rd Sunday After Epiphany
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MARK 1:14 – 20 “THE TIME IS FULFILLED”

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

“The time is fulfilled,” are the first words of Jesus recorded in Mark’s Gospel. Time for what? How can time be fulfilled? What does this mean? And what does it have to do with us living at this time?

Jesus wasn’t talking about Tebow time or the NFL playoffs. Jesus wasn’t talking about tax time, work time, or vacation time. Jesus wasn’t talking about prime time TV, but these words of Jesus began the prime time news announcement of all time.

Thanks to St. Mark we get an idea of the time that Jesus first spoke these words and the context in which He spoke them. Thanks to St. Mark we can know what Jesus meant when He first said, “The time is fulfilled.” St. Mark records: *14 Now after John was imprisoned Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God 15 and saying that, “The time is fulfilled and the reign of God is come, repent and believe in the good news.”*

Importantly Jesus first spoke these words after He had received the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins that John had been proclaiming to all of Judea and Jerusalem in the wilderness. God had sent John to baptize sinners of the house of Israel in order to prepare them for the coming of the Christ, the Son of God. At that same time Jesus also came to the Jordan; He stood with sinners and was baptized for sinners because this was what God the Father had sent Him to do. After His baptism Jesus was then tempted in the wilderness by the devil and prevailed, while John continued preaching and baptizing until the time he was arrested by agents of King Herod. After these things Jesus went into Galilee and made the prime time announcement for all time.

Mark describes Jesus’ announcement or proclamation as “the good news of God.” This is crucial in two respects; it means that Jesus’ announcement is beneficial, favorable, and good for those who hear; and that this news is from God and about what God is doing. Jesus proclaimed, *“The time is fulfilled and the reign of God is come, repent and believe in the good news.”* In other words, right then and there, as Jesus was preaching, in His very person, God was restoring His kingly authority over creation that had rebelled and fallen away in sin. The time was fulfilled, the time had come, for God to act and set things right personally in the world that He created. The time had come for the serpent’s head to be crushed, the time had come for all the peoples of the earth to be blessed, the time had come for the greater exodus, the time had come for God to save and dwell with humanity, the time had come for God to do what He had promised long ago. There and

then, at that time, in Jesus and in His words, God was reigning for the good of all according to His promises.

More than any other nation or people, the children of Israel knew about the power and promises of God's coming reign. They had witnessed the power of God intervening in the world to save them from slavery to Egypt in the exodus. After the exodus, God renewed with Israel the promises that He had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and took Israel to be His chosen people; God gave Israel the Law and Commandments to order the life of the people and called Israel to be a witness to the pagan nations that the LORD the God of Israel alone was God and King. Through prophets, priests, and kings God provided order and justice to the people, punished evil doers, delivered the people from enemies, and spoke killing words of judgement and life giving words of forgiveness. Throughout the Holy Scriptures, the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings of what we now call the Old Testament, God yet promised His people that a time was coming, when He would act in a new and definitive way to establish justice and peace, to punish the wicked and to vindicate the righteous who trusted in Him. The whole people of Israel was awaiting this coming time, the time of fulfillment, the time of God's reign.

To this people, Israel, awaiting the time of God's coming reign, after His baptism and after John's arrest Jesus proclaimed, *"The time is fulfilled and the reign of God is come, repent and believe in the good news."* Jesus announcement created quite the stir in Israel at the time! Some believed this good news that He was announcing, even though they didn't quite understand it or the One who was proclaiming it. St. Mark presents at least four people who believed in the good news that Jesus was proclaiming, who came to trust in Him, those fishermen: Simon (better known as Peter), Andrew, James, and John.

16 And when He had passed by the Sea of Galilee He saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting nets in the sea for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Come after Me, and I will make you to be fishers of men." 18 And immediately they left the nets and they followed Him. 19 And when He went on a little He saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother and they were in the boat mending the nets. 20 And immediately He called them. And they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired workers and they went after Him.

Simon, Andrew, James, and John did not understand everything about Jesus and the reign of God come in Him, but they heard and believed Jesus' Word and His call to them. Jesus' Word, His prime time announcement, brought them to repentance and faith. Jesus' Word, His call, effected a change in them; there old life was ended and a new life following after Jesus begun. Jesus said, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men," and despite their lack of understanding, despite their own sinfulness and despite their own unfaithfulness, Jesus' Word and call was true; Peter, Andrew, James, and John became fishers of men. These ordinary sinful people were caught up in God's reign come in Jesus and after the time of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father's right hand they too announced the coming of God's reign in Jesus.

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy

Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself”(Acts 2:38-39).

But what of us and our time? What does Jesus and His prime time announcement have to do with us living at this time? Jesus and His announcement are not just things of the past to remember and think about, but they are of primary importance for you, me, and all those living today in this time. Jesus and His announcement is prime time for all time! *“The time is fulfilled and the reign of God is come, repent and believe in the good news.”*

Many other messages and announcements are competing for your attention at this time. Commercial after commercial announces all sorts of different stuff that you need to be a happy, whole, and fulfilled person; you and the world will be better as long as you have this stuff. The entertainment industry says, don't worry about sin, death, and all that depressing stuff, just be happy and ignore it, live for the now; eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die. Preachers, teachers, and philosophers tell you that eternal life and your best life now are a matter your willing, striving, and acting, so just think positively, work hard and give it your best, pray and believe and God will give you the desires of your heart. But all these messages are empty and impotent; they cannot give what they promise. They do not address what you and the world really needs.

Gaining more stuff in this world never satisfies; there is always something more you could have. Entertainment only hides your problems for the moment it doesn't deal with them. Your own hard work and effort can only do so much; you can't fix other people; you can't even fix yourself. And thanks be to God you don't have to. God's reign has come in Christ Jesus to do what you can't do.

“The time is fulfilled and the reign of God is come, repent and believe in the good news.” With this prime time announcement of Jesus proclaimed to you today, God's reign is breaking into your life here and now. God knows you. God knows everything that is not right in your life. God knows your failures. God knows your brokenness. God knows your sin and guilt. God is acting today in Christ Jesus to forgive your sin and guilt and to make you new in Christ. Remember you are His baptized child. You were washed, sanctified, and justified. Christ Jesus has called you out your old life and given you a new one. In the new life, you follow after Jesus and give witness to God's great saving acts in Him. In the new life, you love and serve your neighbor in the vocations that God has called you to. You follow after Jesus ever repenting and believing in the good news.

The devil, death, and sin are evils and problems that you and the world cannot overcome. God needs to do something. God has done something; God has acted in His Son Jesus Christ for you. *“The time is fulfilled and the reign of God is come, repent and believe in the good news.”* Through Jesus' death and resurrection God has purchased and won forgiveness of sins; He has defeated death; and He has crushed the devil for you. God's victory for you in Jesus is certain and secure.

So like Peter, Andrew, James, and John before you repent and believe the good news. Repent of your sin. Repent of your greediness for the things of this world. Repent of your self indulgence- filling your life with only that which is entertaining.

Repent of your good works- your willing, striving, and acting. Trust alone in Jesus and His work to save. Believe that His righteousness covers your sin. By faith follow after He who called you in Baptism to be His disciple. The time is fulfilled; God's reign has come in Jesus for you! Amen.