

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Septuagesima, the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, February 8, 2009**  
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Hymns: 324: 1-4, 343:2, 319, 321, 134:5.  
Lessons: Deuteronomy 18: 15-20, Acts 2: 22-41a, Mark 1: 1-20.  
Sermon Text: Mark 1: 14-15.  
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The gospel of Mark is the shortest of the Gospels. It deals in greater detail with our Lord's acts than with his sayings. Mark quotes the Old Testament only once and that in his opening statement.

Just listen to this summary of what Mark reports in the first six chapters: Look what Jesus did. In our text for today he preached. He cast out evil spirits. He healed Simon's mother-in-law. He healed more who were demon-possessed. He "heals many". He prayed. He preached. He healed leprosy. He healed a paralytic. He forgave sins. He spent time with those considered "sinners" and tax collectors. (He didn't sin with them, but preached the Word of God to them.) He reminded people that the Sabbath day was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. By this time in chapter 3 the Pharisees plotted to kill him. He healed many. He preached by the lake and then calmed the storm. He cast out another evil spirit. He healed Jairus' daughter, and a Samaritan woman. And that is only in the first 6 out of 16 chapters.

Today let's look at Jesus' first action recorded by Mark, where he proclaims

**"THE TIME HAS COME ... THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEAR"**

1. ***"Repent"***
2. ***"Believe the good news!"***

Mark's purpose was not to write a biography, but to present Jesus Christ to us as the man who is the very son of God sent by the heavenly father to take our place, that is, to pay the price for sin and to win salvation for us. God guided Mark in this task of putting into writing the gospel concerning Christ so that you and I, coming face to face with the Savior in Mark's Gospel, may ***"believe the good news"***, that is, have faith in him and live our lives to his glory.

John the Baptist had urged his followers to follow Jesus. In John's gospel, we read ***"When [John the Baptist] saw Jesus passing by, he said, 'Look, the Lamb of God!' When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, 'What do you want?' They said, 'Rabbi' (which means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' 'Come,' he replied, 'and you will see.' So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus."*** John 1:36-40. Andrew was one of the first two of Jesus' disciples as Mark records in our Gospel lesson today.

Mark tells us that ***"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee."*** John the Baptist was most likely imprisoned in Jerusalem, where King Herod eventually beheaded him to fulfill a foolish oath he had made after partying too much. But Jesus went north to the area west of the Sea of Galilee and was preaching, telling of the good news of God. The KJV is a bit more specific and says ***"Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,"*** Mark 1:14 (KJV). Jesus was not preaching about restoring the physical kingdom of King David, but he was proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. That kingdom of God is

his ruling, ruling here and now on earth in the hearts of believers, and after judgment day actively ruling all things from his throne at the right hand of God. So no earthly rulers or leaders should have feared that Jesus would overthrow the Roman government. The religious leaders had reason to fear because they weren't teaching and doing the will of God. They were so wrapped up in their own power and authority and twisting God's Laws to fit their lifestyles and opinions in this life that Jesus had to set them straight about the real purpose of God's law. From the catechism, we summarize the purpose or use of the law as a curb to hinder, to some degree, all men from outward lawlessness, and as a mirror to show all men that their lives do not live up to God's commands, and as a guide for believers to follow as they serve the Lord God.

Notice the simple way Mark summarizes the message Christ proclaimed and presents Jesus' preaching: ***"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"*** Jesus' message was the good news of the kingdom of God, or, in Christ's own words, the time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news – gospel means good news. This message led its first hearers back into the Scriptures which they had heard in their synagogues, which some of them now did understand in its proper religious sense.

So when Jesus now proclaimed ***"the time has come"*** and ***"The kingdom of God is near"***, those who knew their Old Testament did not misinterpret it politically but were born again in their hearts and looked for the Messiah-King – the king of grace who would forgive their sins.

The way to come to the king, as Christ points out, is to ***"repent and believe the good news"***. Repent means to have a change of heart as far as sin is concerned and in this connection points to the good news concerning the one in whom they would find forgiveness of sins. Jesus called on his hearers to turn away from the service of sin, to be sorry they had fallen away from God, and by faith to trust in him who alone offers forgiveness. Surely that is the good news mankind needs whether in Galilee or in our own towns.

What does it mean to repent? Well, even a very young Christian, a child who is also a child of God knows the words "I'm sorry". That is part of what repentance is all about. When you do or say or think something wrong, sinful, evil, you say "I'm sorry". That is a daily part of the life of the Christian. And of course, you know what is next. When we tell God "I'm sorry", God says "I forgive you." And so it is in the daily lives of Christians: We say "I'm sorry" when we sin and we say "I forgive you" when someone sins against us.

From the catechism you learn that the word "repent" means, in the broad sense, the way Jesus uses it in our text, to be sincerely sorry for our sins, and to trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of all our sins, and to seek to amend, or change, our sinful life, or, in the words of Luther, that our new man, our "new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever".

But let's examine that word "repent" a little more closely. On Communion Sundays, we often use specific words of confession of our sins, showing by these words that we are truly sorry for our sins. (Page 16 in the hymnal) We admit that we are "poor, miserable sinner(s)". We confess unto God "all our sins and iniquities with which we have ever offended" our God. We admit that we have rightly and properly deserved God's "temporal and eternal punishment." But we humbly confess "I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them". We ask again for God's "boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death" of Jesus Christ and that he be gracious and merciful to us. And you surely remember that we confess our sins in the first person: I am guilty of all this, not just stating a generic "we". Repentance is a very personal thing. It must be yours. No one else can repent for you, just as no one else can believe in Jesus for you. No one gets to heaven because of the faith of another person.

Occasionally we use the confession of sins on page 48 in the front of the hymnal, in a question and answer form. We confess that we have "sinned against God and deserved his wrath and punishment." We repent of all

our sins, thinking of penitent humans in the scriptures like King David, Peter, and others. We confess and admit that we believe that “God, by grace, for Jesus’ sake, will forgive [us] all our sins.” And the fourth question on that page is certainly implied whenever we repent: “Do you promise that with the aid of the Holy Ghost you will henceforth amend your sinful life?” Amend means to change, and is the word used to change the most fundamental document of our nation, the constitution of the United States of America. Our constitution has “amendments” which change it. So even in the very word “amend” we recognize a solemnity, a seriousness of intent that is present every time we repent. Changing the sinful activity is part of repentance.

And that concept of amending our sinful lives is present every time we say “I’m sorry”. We are mindful of God forgiving our sins whenever we say to another human being “I forgive you”.

With John the Baptist in prison and soon to be executed, Jesus knew that the climax of his own life's work was approaching. It was months later that he revealed this fact to his apostles but he was fully aware of it now. He also knew that, when his work of redemption would be complete, he would return to the Father in heaven. So one of the tasks facing him was to choose and instruct a group of followers who would then become his *“witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth”*. Acts 1:8. Mark doesn't tell us of the birth of Jesus Christ like Matthew and Luke do. He jumps right into Jesus' work, Jesus' ministry, starting with John baptizing him.

*“The time has come,” [Jesus] said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”* Repentance doesn't just stand alone. It is in the context of faith: *“believe the good news!”* Believe! Trust! Have confidence in! And what is it we are to believe in? Not ourselves. Not money. Not things of this world. Not rulers who claim they can change our nation for the better. But we are to *“believe the good news!”* That good news is the “gospel”. That good news says Jesus died to save you from your sins. That good news, that gospel was summarized for you in Catechism Instruction class as “SOS”, that is, the Gospel “Shows Our Savior”, it “Shows Our Salvation”. That good news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only real hope for any and all of mankind. That Gospel is the only hope you have of any better life, of heaven.

You don't have to earn heaven. In fact, you can't. You are to believe the good news that God gives you in Jesus Christ. We can learn that there is a God even from nature. But what no one can learn from nature is that *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”* John 3:16-18. Heaven, eternal life in heaven is the free gift of God. Could there be any better news?

We might think of all the “news” that we receive today: newspapers, radio, television, magazines, even the internet. How much of it is really “good news”? How much of it will have any importance in our lives in a week or in a month? But when we hear the good news Jesus Christ gives us, that will be important for the rest of your life. That good news from God will lead you into eternity in heaven.

So there is no better news than the gospel of Jesus Christ. And Mark closes his book with a special command from the one who gives you that gospel to share it with others: *“Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”* Mark 16:14-16.

Lord, lead us daily to *“Repent and believe the good news!”* Amen.