

Sermon for 21 January 2018.

The message in the readings today fits well with last week's message. We may recall last Sunday and the readings about God's call on his people.

In the sermon we touched on the interconnected themes of knowing and being known, friendship and positive response to the call. Today's gospel reading from Mark offers us added assurance and instruction that is key in the context of positive response to God's call in the kingdom.

Jesus words: *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news;* from his opening proclamation of the Kingdom of God in Marks gospel. They are, many believe, a summary of the whole gospel.

Jesus words tell us that the time had arrived for fulfilment of long-standing yearnings and hopes. The words proclaim that God is acting to re-establish his beneficent will for the people. And Jesus - in flesh and blood - as one of us - manifests the personal encounter that God is experiencing with his creation.

In response, the people are called to repent, to turn to God and embrace God's way that Jesus embodies here on earth.

As the story continues in the gospel reading, we hear that directly after Jesus delivers his opening proclamation about the kingdom, he gathers his first disciples - and this takes place around the Sea of Galilee.

The sense of excitement related to the newness that was about to unfold, was anticipated by the first four disciples that he called. They simply left everything behind, livelihood, family, daily routine and followed him. It is amazing! They were captivated. They were literally among fishing nets when Jesus drew them out from their accustomed lives.

We see in his encounter with the first disciples that Jesus finds people where they are. He is not looking for perfection, but for openness to embrace change and belief in God's way.

We might even say that the catchers were caught before they were turned by Jesus into fishers of others. The main point here is the call and the response.

Jesus embodies a newness, a difference that is irresistible. And this type of newness is like no other. It has little to do with external systems, as Paul writes in the epistle, such as economic or social form and the emotional aspects of life rooted in them. It has everything to do with our inner being. It has to do with a deeper consciousness about God personally with us in our daily life.

It is about a shift from an old way, to a new way of understanding ourselves as creative, accompanied and guided, to a new way of understanding God as a loving father, and to a new way of understanding each other as individuals, yet ones who seek caring relationships.

Repentance and belief are the life experiences that are to be our response to God who enables the shift.

This is the mystery of God at work in our lives.

In the story of Jonah (the first reading) we glimpse something of the depth and quality of that mystery in God's mercy.

When the city dwellers of Nineveh repent, when they open their minds and hearts and turn to a different way of being open to God, they recognise where their own salvation is. God awaits them there, and the city is saved.

The Psalter this morning relates the beauty of encounter with God and trust in him:

*Wait on God alone in stillness o my soul, for in him is my hope.*

*He alone is my rock and my salvation my stronghold so that I shall not be shaken.*

*Put your trust in him always, my people; pour out your hearts before him, for God is our refuge.*

This is indeed the good news that Jesus Christ proclaims: the *time is fulfilled. Repent and believe in the good news.*

The wonder is that regardless of what our past holds, whatever our fears are about things hidden within, we are transformable in the kingdom that Jesus inaugurates.

Each generation down through the ages is invited into the newness that Jesus Christ brings.

May we be ever like the first disciples who were captivated by it!

The Lord be with you.