

The Third Sunday After the Epiphany
January 21 & 22, 2006
Sermon by Rev Timothy A Leitzke

Jesus cuts to the chase, doesn't he? "Hey! After me!" People follow! Why? I remember being asked in high school Sunday School if I would have followed Jesus. I believed that had I seen him something would have drawn me to him. How was he so good at it? That's not an entirely fair question. This *is* a story. There are plenty of people in the story who do *not* follow Jesus, and frequently the ones who follow, the disciples, don't seem to know what they are doing. Yet this Jesus has incredible success. What's his hook? In biblical narratives a character's first line provides the key to who they are. In today's reading from the Gospel According to St Mark we hear Jesus' first line, "The critical time has been fulfilled and the Reign of God has come near. Change your minds and believe in the gospel." The urgency of these words sets the tone of Mark's story, and the cause of this urgency is the gospel Jesus mentions.

So what is the gospel? That question is tougher to answer than it sounds. St Mark gives us his answer in Jesus' first line. "The critical time has been fulfilled and the Reign of God has come near." Indeed, in Mark's compelling Greek the very first word issuing from the mouth of Christ is the verb, "has been fulfilled." Whatever you were waiting for is over. God has already done everything that there is to do. God is already here. When we are down, defeated, or hurt we wait for our reprieve; we look to God to set things right; we recognize that we cannot get out of the jam we're in without God's help. Jesus tells us that God is already here. God is lifting us up. God is giving us hope. God is healing us. God has not completed the victory over Sin & Death but the Reign of God is here.

Friends of Christ, that is the core of the gospel. We don't have to wait; God is here now. Of course with Mark's urgency the gospel takes a more imperative character: Stop waiting; God is here now. In this way the gospel is a call. The gospel tells us that God loves us and is with us right now, and the Gospel drives us to love others and to be with them right now. Jesus proclaims the gospel—we don't have to wait; God is here—and then the gospel drives him to call others. What draws them, what catches them in the midst of their work, is the gospel Jesus proclaims. “Hey, Simon, Andrew, you don't have to wait; God is here now. Change your minds and believe in the gospel. Follow me.” “Jake and John, you don't have to wait; God is here now. Change your minds and believe in the good news. Follow me.” “Hey, Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Manasquan, I have good news: you don't have to wait for God; God is here now. Believe in this good news. Follow me.”

Friends of Christ it is a leap of faith to follow Christ, a leap out of our old lives and into new ones. It takes that repentance, literally that change of mind, to do it, but we make that leap with God. When we set our feet on the road to follow Christ we plant our feet firmly in the gospel: we do not have to wait for God to be with us; God is with us now. Things will take time. The seeds must be planted. New ministries must be watered and cultivated. Old ministries must not be neglected. God is here working, planting those seeds and cultivating those ministries. We will have to wait to see the full effects; we do not have to wait to do God's work. The critical time has been fulfilled and the Reign of God has come near. Believe this good news, and answer its call. Follow where God leads us. Amen