

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, January 25, 2009
Rev. John Tapscott

“HE CAME PREACHING”

Mark 1:14

We should never forget how Jesus began his ministry. Mark chapter 1 verse 14 reads, “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the good news of the Gospel.” And here is the essence of Jesus’ message, “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the Gospel.”

Preaching has always been a vital part of the church’s ministry. For Jesus preaching was priority. “He came... preaching.” Peter preached, so did Stephen and Paul and Peter. And God continues to call ordinary people to proclaim his word.

Now the Bible is not dull, but I’m afraid that we preachers have sometimes made it so. Sermons and sleep have become synonymous. A man went to see his doctor about snoring. The doctor asked, “Does your snoring disturb your wife?” The patient replied, “Does it disturb my wife? Why it disturbs the whole congregation!” I remember as a youngster going to church and following along in the bulletin and mentally ticking off things as we went, hymns, readings, offering, prayers. It was all going by quickly which pleased me, but I knew that once we got to the sermon, I wouldn’t check off anything for 20 minutes. My father told me not to yawn for that might disturb the preacher. I tried my best.

Now preaching can be enhanced by illustrations, by humour, by visuals and movie clips, but preaching can never be done away with. Jesus came preaching, and the church follows in his footsteps. Preaching is the prime means that God has given us for spreading his truth. Preaching is still the main way God catches people for his Kingdom. In fact, churches which are growing and having maximum impact for God’s Kingdom today are putting not less but more emphasis on preaching. 30 or 40 minute sermons are commonplace in those churches. I can do that, if you’d like.

But whenever God’s truth is proclaimed things happen **to** people and **in** people. That’s God’s intention. Now, preaching is uneven, not only in its human quality, but in the way it’s received. Sometimes a sermon catches you right where you are, and God’s truth speaks powerfully to you. Other times it goes right over your head and misses the mark as far as you are concerned. It sometimes happened when Jesus preached and he was the most gifted preacher ever. It happened to Peter and Paul and the rest. I don’t remember much of the preaching I heard in church when I was younger, but what little I do remember had a lasting effect in shaping my faith. Maybe that’s why I remember it. In the movie, “Oh God!” the grocery store manager played by John Denver asks God, played by George Burns, what good coming to people and talking to them might do. God replies, “You never

know...a seed here, a seed there, something will take hold and grow.” And by the grace of God it does.

We can see this in today’s Gospel reading (Mark 1:14-20). Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel. Then he passed along the Sea of Galilee and called Peter and Andrew and James and John. Some commentators say that these fishermen just rose up and followed when they heard Jesus say “Follow me.” There was no prior preparation. But I’m not so sure. Mark seems to link together Jesus’ preaching and the call of the disciples. Jesus came into Galilee preaching and the fishermen were Galileans. They must have heard Jesus preach. And so that they were ready to go when He called. God’s word can have a dynamic effect. When God’s word is preached something happens in us and something happens to us.

First, the preaching of God’s word moves us to repentance.

Now the word “repent” has taken on a negative connotation. But the deepest meaning of repent is to change your mind, change your focus, literally to turn around, make a U-turn, and go in a new direction. Far too often, the call to repentance comes before good news is preached. But Jesus first announced what God had done and was doing, then called people to turn and embrace it. “The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe the good news.”

If you’re driving your car and discover you’re going in the wrong direction, then you can turn around and go in the right direction. But you have to know what the right direction is before you turn around otherwise you could get doubly lost. And Jesus says is “Here is the right direction, here is the right way, here is the way of salvation; here is the way of blessing; turn around and follow it.” Notice that’s what happened to those fishermen. When Jesus called they turned in a new direction. They turned away from what they were doing and began following Him.

Preaching presents a new way, an alternative to the world’s way. Preaching offers God’s way. Preaching says that we don’t have to find God’s Kingdom or create it or earn it for it’s here now for us to embrace. Preaching says to those who walk in darkness and despair that God’s hope light and God’s hope is here, so turn and let it shine on you. To those walking in the way of moral ruin preaching says, “God has laid the paths of righteousness before you, so turn and walk in them.” To those burdened by guilt, preaching says, “God’s forgiveness is a present reality; turn and receive your salvation.” To those fearful of dying preaching proclaims that God offers eternal life through Christ, so turn and receive the gift by faith. To those consumed by greed, preaching says turn and embrace God’s way of justice and sharing. To the weak preaching proclaims that there is strength and courage in Christ, so turn and accept these gifts from Him.

The effect of preaching is to turn our thoughts, our footsteps and our actions in a new direction. It calls us to turn away from the broken kingdoms of this world and turn towards

God's rule and reign. It calls to us turn away from the way of death and to embrace God's way of life. The first thing preaching does is to turn us in a new direction and orient us toward God. "Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the Good News of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near, repent, turn to it, and believe in the Good News."

Secondly, preaching stirs up faith in us.

"Repent and **believe** in the Good News." Faith, that is the act of believing, is a command, but it's also a gift. It's something that takes hold and grows in us as the word of God is planted in our hearts. According to the Bible, saving faith, that is, faith in Jesus Christ comes from hearing God's word. I can't explain how I came to faith in Christ. But I know that it came about in me as I heard the old, old story of Jesus and his love. And it wasn't just one sermon or one teaching that did it, but many. God's word eventually stirred up faith in me so that I became a follower of Jesus, saved by faith, and a member of his body, the church.

Faith begins to take hold of us as we hear the preaching of Christ incarnate, Christ crucified, Christ risen, Christ coming again. Paul writes in Romans, "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are people to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can people preach unless they are sent?" As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!"

A member of our church knitted for me a pair of woollen socks. She handed them to me and said, "These are preacher's socks." What do you mean," I asked, "preacher's socks?" "Well, it says in the Bible," she replied, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Now the socks do not make my feet beautiful; in fact they help to cover up the imperfections of my feet; but at least they keep my feet warm! Paul goes on to say, "Faith comes from what is heard and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ."

You see, the one who came preaching became in the early church the One who was preached. The early church knew that the Kingdom of God had indeed drawn near - in Jesus Christ, Crucified and Risen. And if you want to see the shape of the Kingdom of God and enter that Kingdom, you do so through faith in Jesus. So the church preached and offered Christ. And so do I so that so that God may stir up and strengthen your faith in Christ. It is a great privilege, for Christ is the Saviour for you and for me and for all people. He is God's Good news for the world. The preacher does their best, but God's word has a power over and above the person who is preaching it. God uses that word to stir up faith in our hearts, faith in Jesus Christ. And once you realize that God has stirred up that faith in you the next step is to profess it before the church and take your full place among the followers of Jesus.

Finally, God's word sends us forth on a mission.

Mark 1:16, 17, "As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the Sea - for they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Now as I said, I think the fishermen had already heard Jesus preach and were ready to go when he called. And here is one of Mark's characteristic emphases. There is no passive, arm-chair following of Jesus in Mark. The disciples don't just sit around and discuss God's word. No, Mark's attitude is that the Kingdom has drawn near and there's people to be saved and served, so get up and get at it, now. The way Mark portrays it is that God's word doesn't just move us into mission; it jolts us into mission, like a hot morning coffee or a splash of cold water on your face.

When God's word stirs up our faith in Jesus then God's word sends us forth on mission in Jesus' name. And it's not our mission; it's a mission Christ gives us according to our gifts and skills. Mine is to preach the word of God and pastor a congregation. What's your mission? You have one, you know. Perhaps to teach a class or lead a small group or to keep the church's books. Some have a ministry of praying for others, or ministries of comfort and compassion. Some have ministries of relief and charity. Some have a special ministry of stewardship. Here and now, in this community, there is work to be done for God's Kingdom; there are people to be loved and served and preached to, and invited into God's Kingdom. And the ultimate goal of all mission in Christ's Name is to catch people for God's Kingdom.

Jesus came into Galilee "preaching." When God's word is preached, something happens in us and something happens to us. God's word moves us to repentance, stirs up faith in us, and sends us forth on mission. By God's grace, may his word be fulfilled in us this day, in the days ahead, and even forevermore.