

MARK 1:14-28
FOLLOWING, FISHING

In the relay race, timing is everything. In the perfect race, the gold-medal winning race, the timing of the handing over of the baton has to be spot-on; it has to be inside the two yellow lines on the track, the box, and when handovers are timed to perfection then the team has the chance of winning the gold medal. Lots of things can go wrong: teams can drop the baton; they might not handover inside that yellow box. Then, how does one runner know when to start to run so that the handover is perfect and stretched out to the maximum? They make chalk-marks, or tape marks, on the track; runner number two will start to run when runner number one reaches the check mark and so on. They need to practice in order to make sure the check marks are in the right place. Too early, or too late, and the whole thing falls apart and the team drops out!

We have spoken a lot about John the Baptist this winter; we have read his stories and reflected on his ministry, preparing the way for Jesus to come. He was the voice telling people that the Messiah was coming; he baptised Jesus in the river Jordan and God's spirit came on Jesus and God declared Jesus to be His Son, all preparing Jesus for His ministry yet to come. John was the one who prepared way; he was not the main act and he knew that he was not the main act. Jesus was the main act; Jesus was the One people were waiting for. It was time to hand over; it was time for Jesus to start. How would they know when the time was right? "*After John...*" (Mark 1:14) Later in the gospels, we're told why John was in prison: he had confronted Herod and Herod had taken issue with something John had said and so he had him thrown into prison and later killed. John in prison seems to be the check-mark for Jesus, now is the time.

"*The time...*" (Mark 1:15) For hundreds of years, the prophets have been saying that the Messiah is coming; for a while John the Baptist has been saying that the Messiah is coming; now the time has come, Jesus is here and His ministry has started. The Church tries to re-enact this by the season of Advent: for 4 weeks in December we read the pieces of the Bible that remind us of God's promise to send the Messiah and we light candles to tell us that this is the season for looking forward; then on Christmas Day, we declare "the time has come; Jesus is here". Jesus is born in Bethlehem! Now 30 years after Bethlehem, the time has come in a different way and Jesus is here; His ministry has started; He preaches the good news of the kingdom and demonstrates the good news of the kingdom by healing a man with an evil spirit. All that needed to be done to prepare had been done and now the time has come; Jesus is here.

The King has come: "*the kingdom...*" (Mark 1:15) Jesus is king! We know about kingdoms; we live in one! The Queen has been in the news a fair bit this last couple of weeks, talking about her coronation and crowns and how heavy they are, and something of what it was like to go through the experience of the coronation. The coronation is the mark of her sovereignty as queen; she is given the symbols of her rule, the orb, the sceptre and then the crown; these mark her out as sovereign over her people. Jesus had no symbols of kingship, no crown, no coronation ceremony; no kingdom on a map, no place to which He could point and say "here is my kingdom!" But the king is all through this passage; you want to know what Jesus looks like as king, just follow these stories; here is a king with authority! What he says and does – that's where we see Jesus as King. He preaches, He calls people, He heals.

He preaches: "*repent and believe...*" (Mark 1:15) These are couched as commands. This is not Jesus giving good advice; this is Jesus telling it like it is. Here is what the king is telling His people to do. "*What is this...*" (Mark 1:27) When He spoke, people recognised Jesus' authority; the King is telling His people like it is. We've changed things a bit in our new age: we still describe Jesus as King and Head of His Church; we still say that 'Jesus is Lord' when we profess our faith, but often we have relegated Jesus to a different position, that of "life advisor";

“coach”; “wise man” and we can then pick and choose when we listen to him; we listen to Him when it suits us and for Jesus to be “life coach” is very different from calling Him “King” or “Lord”. The life coach we can listen to or not as we choose and when it suits us and we may find lots of good advice coming from Jesus; He has lots of wisdom to offer. But we no longer make Him a king who commands us and we are obliged to obey! He spoke with authority and people were compelled to listen and obey, compelled by the force of His teaching to repent and believe, to turn their lives around and put Jesus at the centre. Jesus is King, and Lord; let’s listen and obey.

He calls people: Peter and Andrew are working beside the lake, fishing. Jesus came along; maybe He had met these men before and knew them a little bit; He speaks to them: “*Come follow...*” (*Mark 1:17*) It wasn’t unusual for teachers to have a group of followers, pupils, or disciples; Jesus sets out this invitation to Peter and Andrew and then later to James and John, to follow Him. There are two parts to this call: first of all, they are called to follow Jesus, to go with Him wherever He went, to travel with Him through Galilee and then later to Jerus and other places. As they went they watched, and saw what Jesus did; they listened, and heard what He said; they watched Him and He became their role model; and they talked together about all of this; they learned to follow Him in another way by becoming the kind of people He wanted them to be. Secondly, Jesus called them to be fishers – as we said earlier, to tell others these stories of Jesus; “this is what we saw; this is what we heard!” As they told these stories, other people heard; the news spread, and other people came to Jesus to see, to be healed, to listen and learn, and their lives were changed. Jesus the king calls people and they respond; they follow.

He heals people: this story of man with an evil spirit bothers us because we’re not quite sure how to explain it. There was something in this man that was disturbing him, that was destroying him from the inside, that was ruining his life. “*Be quiet...*” (*Mark 1:25*) Here is King Jesus healing this man by driving out the spirit that was troubling him; here is King Jesus showing that He has the power and authority to do this and to leave this man with a quiet heart and mind, with a sense of wholeness and well-being and peace. Time and time again Jesus did things like this, healing people in all sorts of ways and from all kinds of difficulties. People were amazed and the news spread; Jesus the king is here.

There is something here that Jesus does: He is King and He is still king over our lives in something of these same ways. He tells us what kind of people we should be and how we should live our lives; this is not the church telling us, but here is Jesus telling us – there is a huge difference! He is King! He does things for us: He saves us; He forgives us; He heals us and helps us; He gives us strength to live our lives well; He helps us deal with life when life is messy and hard; He brings hope to our hearts and minds when life is tough and we are in despair; He does all kinds of things for us to make us new people, to help us be the right kind of people. What we read today, He would spend three years doing these kinds of things and then ultimately, He would die on a cross and be raised; the king who saves His people.

There is something here that we do: we tell other people. Jesus has committed the telling of His stories to us. How do we know about Jesus? Someone has told us. A preacher, a parent, a grandparent, a teacher, a Sunday School teacher, a Youth group leader, a Holiday Club leader – someone has told us about Jesus and so we know something of Him. How does a new generation of people find out about Jesus? We tell them. That’s what we are called to do, to tell others about Jesus so that new generations of people can believe in Him. Not everybody wants to hear; not everybody is ready to hear; but Jesus committed the telling of His stories to us; we are His partners in this great kingdom-mission in the world.

Jesus is King – listen to Him, obey Him, be the kind of people He wants us to be. Tell His stories; take our courage in our hands and tell His stories, pass them on, spread the news so that other people will hear and believe. So the kingdom grows; spread the news!