

An Urgent Mission

Today we're talking about missions; urgent missions, in particular. Our lesson this morning from the Hebrew Bible was an urgent mission which God sent Jonah on to warn the people of Nineveh to repent. We heard the outcome, or result, of the Ninevites hearing God's warning through Jonah – "The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth," (Jonah 3:5).

Our gospel lesson will also examine an urgent mission – one issued to the first disciples from Jesus Himself. If you have a Bible or Bible app handy, turn with me to Mark 1:14-20. **Read Mark 1:14-20.**

Today's gospel lesson continues the story of Jesus collecting disciples and followers. Unlike John in his gospel, Mark gives us a little more background information regarding the circumstances and the context of what's happening in the region. Mark writes, "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' He said, 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'" (Mark 1:14-15). In these couple verses, we hear Jesus pick up some of John's lingo – the call to people to repentance. That's the same message John the Baptist had been saying while he was doing his ministry of baptizing people in the Jordan River.

Repent and Believe!

The Greek word used for "repent" in these couple verses, simply means "change one's mind." By this point, John the Baptist is in Herod's prison cell. He had made Herod mad for speaking out about Herod's Jerry Springer-like spouse swap with Herod's brother. What a mess! You know, sometimes God calls us to repent – to change our minds – but we're so stuck in our sin that we dig our heels in and refuse to turn things around. I suspect that's where Herod was. He knew what he had done was wrong, but his pride got in the way, so he had John arrested. Well, the other piece of the message Jesus was saying, was "believe the good news." What is the "good news?" As followers today, we have a better grasp of what the Good News is – that Christ died for us, rose to life three days later, ascended to the Father, and will come again to bring all things to conclusion in Himself. That's going to be an amazing day for us, friends! He takes great care of us, and He's going to show us greater things than we can hope or imagine!

In those days, people may not have had that understanding, of "good news." Jesus points to what the good news is, in the sentence He speaks prior. He says, "The

kingdom of God has come near.” Even then, that should have been good news! They had been waiting a long time for the Messiah to come, and to usher in God’s kingdom.

It’s remarkable, really, that God would love us enough, to send Jesus, His Son, to be:

Firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a Man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when He comes, those who belong to Him. Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed all dominion, authority and power, (1 Cor. 15:20b-24).

Come, Follow Me

He loves us without reservation! Notice what happens next in Mark’s account. “As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ‘Come, follow Me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’ At once they left their nets and followed Him,” (Mark 1:16-18). Jesus sees these two brothers who were fishermen, and calls them to follow Him. And then, a little while later, Jesus repeats His call to a couple other fishermen.

“When He had gone a little farther, He saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed Him,” (verses 19-20). There’s a few interesting things I want to point out on these four guys who follow Jesus. First, Simon and Andrew and the sons of Zebedee were not in the same socio-economic class. Bible commentaries suggest that Simon and Andrew were using small hand nets and were likely fishermen who worked for people like the family of James and John. Mark describes the sons of Zebedee as being part of a family business which includes boats and large nets that are thrown overboard, requiring a number of hired men to work the nets. James and John would have inherited this family business, and yet, they walk away from it to follow Jesus.

Can you imagine Zebedee? I wonder what he thought when the young, 29 or 30 year old Jesus came walking along the beach that day, and called to his sons, “Hey James and John, come follow Me.” I suspect when they didn’t come home that afternoon, Zebedee may have felt some angst. What was he going to do now with his lucrative fishing business?

One Last Mission

We aren’t told why James and John, Simon and Andrew, or any of the other apostles for that matter, were chosen, or why they left their lives and families behind to follow Jesus. Were they exceptional? Did their fishing skills reveal a particular ability

that would be useful in Jesus' ministry? Despite these questions, it's evident that there was a sense of urgency to Jesus' call on their lives by the way they respond.

James Bond is a fictional character from a book series originally written in the 1950's. They've since made lots of movies and have had half a dozen actors play the role since they started filming them in the 1960's. Guys like Sean Connery, Pierce Brosnan, and most recently Daniel Craig, have starred in them. Usually the story-line to most of the James Bond films is that the almost-retired agent 007 has to complete "one last mission," and it turns out to be the most intense, action-packed mission of his life.

For instance, Daniel Craig, as James Bond, had to safely deliver the Queen to the Summer Olympics in 2012. Let's watch how he does that. **Play video:**

<https://olympics.com/en/video/the-queen-drops-into-london-2012-with-james-bond>

Bucket Lists

It tends to be when we're in periods of being complacent and content, that we're often rudely shaken into action. In 2011, Candy Chang, a New Orleans native, experienced the sudden death of a close friend. The death of her friend woke her up from living a life of complacency to living a life with a sense of urgency. Thoughts of death and grief brought clarity to what was meaningful in her life. With an abandoned house across the street from her home, Chang wondered how she could use the abandoned property as a public space to connect people, making neglected space into constructive space – a place of loneliness into a reminder that we are never alone.

Chang painted the house with chalkboard paint, and wrote the sentence, "Before I die, I want to _____." The blank spaces were invitations for passersby to complete the sentence with their own words. The words ranged from silly to profound. From sadness and regret to hope and joy. Words such as, "Before I die, I want to sing for millions," "...plant a tree," "...live off the grid," "...hold her one more time," "...follow my childhood dream," "...tell my parents I love them one more time." Since then, Chang's "Before I Die" vision has spread, and now has 5,000 sites scattered across the six inhabited continents.

If you were given the option to finish the sentence, what would you put on this shortest of bucket lists? What would we, as a local church, put on our blank? Friends, we know that all things eventually do come to an end. If we could do just one thing more before we went out, what would it be to make the most impact for the kingdom?

What Urgent Mission Are You Called To?

From their ordinary, run-of-the-mill daily routines and work on the seashore, Jesus awakened the first disciples to a new sense of meaning and life-changing purpose that compelled them to drop what they were doing right then – and follow Him. The deep sense of urgency overrode any need for full understanding of what was at

stake, or even a complete grasp of Whom they were following. It was enough for them to take a step – we might say a leap – of faith.

Over the last couple weeks, we've seen that Jesus can be secretive, but He is certainly not subtle! As He says in verse 15 in today's passage, in the Common English Bible, "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!" Jesus most definitely has something to accomplish – though the goal may not immediately be revealed to us. He continues to issue a bold and clear call, shaking would-be followers out of our complacency.

He wants us to live lives that reflect His presence in us. We are surrounded by a mission field desperate to find the living hope we find in Jesus Christ alone. We've highlighted one mission earlier this morning, regarding Souper Bowl Sunday, and bringing in food items that will go to Agape to feed hungry people right here in Shelby County. On February 6, around 5:00 or 5:30 in the evening, we'll be serving the meal and holding the chapel service at Alpha Center, which is across the parking lot from the homeless shelter and jail. I wonder, what urgent mission might God be calling you to – as an individual, but also as an integral part of this faith community?

Prayer: Almighty God, in every age You have called out men and women to be Your faithful servants. We believe You have now called us to join that great company who seek to follow You. Grant unto us today and always a clear vision of Your call and strength to fulfill the ministry assigned to us. We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.