

# Sermon preached at Gisborne, 24 January 2021

*O God, our guide, set your path clearly before us and lead us to follow you willingly for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Mark 1:14-20

## ***Immediacy and the fullness of time in God's kingdom***

Immediacy and the fullness of God's time seem the opposite. Immediacy means that we may bring something into direct and instant involvement with something while the fullness of time means the state of being is complete, or it becomes whole. When it comes to the fullness of time, we can say that it is filled with the infinite number of occasions of immediacy. Readings from Jonah and Mark will help us see these elements in God's kingdom. Next, it will help us see that our faith lives consisted of immediacy in the fullness of time in God's kingdom.

## **The fullness of time in God's kingdom**

We are still at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Mark. Last Sunday Jesus calls his first disciples Philip and Nathanael, and today, he calls four fishermen at the Sea of Galilee - Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John. Jesus begins his ministry by proclaiming the "good news" of the gospel, saying, "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near." Here Jesus' coming was the "fullness of time," because he is the messenger promised in the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> The fullness of time and the kingdom of God go together. The 'time' means God's time (*Kairos*) which is beyond the clock time (*Chronos*). By saying that the time (*Kairos*) "is fulfilled," Jesus says that the reign of God in God's kingdom is at hand. Here understanding "the kingdom (*basileia*) of God"<sup>2</sup> is important. A New Testament scholar Morna Hooker suggests that we might translate *basileia* as kingship rather than kingdom. The word kingdom implies the geographical territory over which a king reigns, but God's kingship is his sovereign rule over the hearts of people - not land. It is what the fullness of God's time and the kingdom of God have in common since the reign of God encompasses time and space and all.

The Israelites of Jesus' day thought of God's kingdom as a restoration of the power and glory that Israel enjoyed during David's reign - God ruling through his chosen people, Israel. But Jesus tells of a very different kind of kingdom - a kingdom that "is at hand."<sup>3</sup> - a spiritual kingdom that is realized when we surrender our hearts to God, and eventually, it is realized as a physical kingdom on a daily basis through our total submission to the love of God. But it is not that simple or straightforward. It includes many more decisive immediacy.

In Jonah 3:3, Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Even though Nineveh was an exceedingly large city - a three days' walk across, Jonah made it a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"<sup>4</sup> In previous chapters, Jonah had been running away from God. To become the worker of God, Jonah had to go through the process of repentance. It includes experiencing a mighty storm, being thrown to the sea and then eventually he ended up in the belly of the fish. There he prayed to God, who heard his prayer. Now he became a faithful servant of God, and he acted on what God commanded him immediately. Although Jonah chapter 3 is subtitled as conversion of Nineveh, it is more about the conversion of Jonah as he had to surrender himself to God entirely before he went to Nineveh. We

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 4:4 - 'But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law'; Ephesians 1:10 - 'as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.'

<sup>2</sup> Verse 15a

<sup>3</sup> Mark 1:15

<sup>4</sup> Jonah 3:3-4

can say that Jonah's life as a missionary consists of the infinite number of occasions of immediacy in the fullness of time in that God reigns.

### **Immediacy of God's kingdom**

The second section of Mark 1:16-20 shows what immediacy of the kingdom looks like. Jesus, walking along the Sea of Galilee, sees the two brothers Simon and Andrew, fishermen, casting their nets in the sea. He calls them to follow, and immediately, in obedience, they leave their nets and follow him. The same happens with James and John. The *kai euthus* (immediately) of 1:18 and 1:20, a favourite phrase of Mark, gives expression to the urgency of the call. Mark's gospel is called 'the gospel of immediacy' as the word 'immediately' *euthus* is used many times. Take a few examples in chapter one: in Jesus' baptism, we read, "And *just as (euthus)* he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him."<sup>5</sup> In temptation of Jesus, we read, "And *immediately* the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness"<sup>6</sup> (v. 12) to name a few.

Whenever we read this word – immediately in Mark, we can't help but ask what made them act on the words/deeds in such a manner. Mark doesn't explain it much. Yet through the barest essentials, while leaving behind the details, Mark seems to emphasize the compelling nature of Jesus' call. He didn't say to follow his agenda, but him as he is the kingdom of God in person. The word 'immediately' not only connect the time before and after the word but also the actions as well. When Jesus calls Simon and Andrew by saying, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him.<sup>7</sup> The lives of Simon and Andrew may have been dramatically changed after they followed him. These men did not seek to become Jesus' disciples. It was Jesus' initiative, not theirs, that resulted in their becoming Jesus' followers. That is typical of call stories.<sup>8</sup> Their immediate actions were added to the immediacy of God's action and plan to save the world. Finite-time and actions are incorporated in the fullness of time in God's kingdom. In all, this word is found no less than forty times in Mark's Gospel. It is the most expressive term, which shows us how Jesus served. There was no delay about Jesus' service, but 'straight away' as he was ready to do his Father's work. So what does it tell us today?

### **Immediacy and the fullness of time in us**

Life of church here and now is when immediacy and the fullness of time are co-existing in us - the church. In our worship service, we hear the same proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God by Jesus at Galilee. In Communion, we share the same spiritual meal shared by the disciples when Jesus broke the bread and poured the wine. Jesus made the Kingdom of God such a central part of his teaching and preaching, we disciples are supposed to do the same. The kingdom of God is fulfilled in God's time when Jesus came, died and raised from the dead. We church does living this fullness of God's kingdom through our immediate actions - words and deeds. Jesus calls us to believe in the Good News - *euangelion*. The Greek word *euangelion* combines the words *eu* 'good' and *angels* to proclaim - related to our word angel, because angels were God's messengers. In the New Testament, *euangelion* means the Good News of Jesus Christ. As the messengers of the good news, we believe that we -ourselves are the good news of Jesus Christ for whom we find the reason for life and the reason for God. May God help us live the life of the good news in the fullness of time in God's kingdom today and always. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Mark 1:10

<sup>6</sup> Mark 1:12

<sup>7</sup> Mark 1:17

<sup>8</sup> See the story of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-9), and Moses (Exodus 3:1-21), and Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1-18), and Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-8).