



Advent 2-December 6, 2020

Baltic and East Nidaros Paris

Mark 1:1-8

"The Gospel is..."

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

This is how Mark introduces his account about Jesus. Thirteen words, one comma, one period, and no verb. Mark gets right to the point from the beginning of his account. Listen and compare to how Luke introduces his account about Jesus. "Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the thing about which you have been instructed." Mark gets to the good news of Jesus Christ quickly with an incomplete sentence while Luke rambles on in with a run-on sentence comprising four verses about what he is going to write about after his careful investigation of everything. But in Luke's detailed accounting, he fails to mention Jesus or good news in his introduction. This is often what happens concerning the gospel or good news. The gospel or good news of Jesus Christ is replaced by something we do and Jesus is forgotten. Mark was the first of the four books in the bible which will call the gospels and it sounded like Luke was going to improve on what was first written by Mark. But the gospel of Jesus is plain, simple and to the point. Mark gets us back on track today of what the gospel was from the very beginning with the short title of his account of Jesus Christ.

It would be interesting to hand out a sheet of paper with these words, "The gospel is" and have you complete the sentence or like Luke fill in the rest of the sheet of paper by dancing around the subject and never getting to the point by forgetting Jesus. This is the first lesson I teach to every confirmation class. They learn what is the gospel and what is not the gospel. Then after learning the difference, I frequently ask them questions to make sure they haven't forgotten or have been taught something different.

*The apostle Paul had clearly taught the people of Galatia this lesson about what is the gospel of Jesus Christ. But when Paul returned to this congregation after a period of time, he said, **"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven would proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed! Galatians 1:6-9***

As you heard from Paul, the problem of preachers proclaiming what they think is the gospel compared to what it was proclaimed from the beginning is not a new problem and it continues to cause problems and confusion

in congregations today. On this second Sunday of Advent, we turn to Mark and learn what the definition of the gospel was from the beginning.

The first point Mark makes in his definition is that the gospel is **of Jesus Christ**. It is not your gospel. If **you** have become the subject of the gospel as had happened to Paul's congregation in Galatia, it is no longer the gospel and we are to be accursed for thinking the gospel is something we are called to do or capable of accomplishing. Next, Mark, without a word about angels, shepherds, mangers, innkeepers, young, faithful parents like Mary and Joseph, stars, or wisemen, simply skips over these details and declares his birth by saying that Jesus is the Son of God. Then, Mark describes what the gospel is. It is a word that preaches a baptism of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. **The gospel is hearing that your sins are forgiven in the name of Jesus Christ**. Turning the gospel into something more than what Mark proclaimed from the beginning is as Paul asserts "Turning to a different gospel as if there was another gospel." It is no longer the gospel.

The details given of the backwoods appearance and quirky dietary habits of John the Baptist were not the reason that the whole countryside of Judea and the whole town of Jerusalem came out to see him. These details were given to confirm that it was what he was preaching that caused this crowd of people to come to listen to him. As Paul said, if you think you are looking at an angel, but do not hear the gospel, let that person be accursed. The crowds gathered to hear the gospel. They left their homes and towns and ornate temples to hear this good news in the wilderness delivered by a peculiar preacher. The good news that they heard was that their sins were forgiven.

If this was not what was preached, not everyone would have left what they were doing to hear this message. If after confessing their sins, John would have qualified the forgiveness by reducing the debt or forgiving some of their sins and not the others, it would no longer have been good news for them. It would have been uncertain news. Maybe people would have felt "better" to have a lighter load of sins to carry by receiving a parole rather than a pardon, but the gospel is never "better" news, it is "good" news. You have already heard the gospel at the beginning of this service after you confessed your sins and then heard the good news in the absolution, "In the name of Jesus Christ and by his authority, I declare to you the **ENTIRE** forgiveness of all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

You may not remember when you first heard those words spoken to you. They were prefaced with these words, "**I baptize you**, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." You have received the baptism that John the Baptist said was coming--a baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism that he performed, forgave sins and was good news, but the baptism you received is even greater. Yours is greater, yours does not leave you wondering what is left to come. What was missing in John's baptism is now here. There is no mention of any season of Advent in any of the gospels and as quickly as Mark moves, there certainly wouldn't be any season of waiting mentioned by Mark. Mark does not want you to be left waiting or uncertain about what is coming. Mark declares the beginning of Jesus Christ is not his birth, but his forgiveness that is yours knowing that you are a sinner and the only good news for you is in Jesus Christ.

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ has never changed. The gospel has not changed into something less and it couldn't be anything more. I was reminded of this clearly as I delivered the Lord's Supper to elderly

people who know the difference between the gospel and what is not good news. They were clearly taught and were eager to hear again the good news of Jesus Christ which John declared in the beginning, the good news of Jesus Christ which is the same today, The gospel is "Your sins are forgiven." Amen