

West Branch Community of Christ

Participant Companion Guide – Lectionary Lessons Pilot

February 23, 2015

First Sunday in Lent

Theme: GOD IS NEAR

Mark 1:9–15 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' 12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

Central Ideas:

- ***Jesus is the Son of God. God's beloved, who we should follow.***
- ***Jesus' baptism experience confirmed his obedience to surrender his will to God.***
- ***Now is the time to share the good news of the kingdom of God.***
- ***We need to look at our priorities if the reign of God is to be reality.***

Exploring the Scripture

Is there any good news? We are desperate for some good news. What is the good news? We need to hear good news. The people in the context of today's scripture were desperate for good news. In 70 CE Galilee, radical Jews were revolting against the Roman oppressors. Jerusalem was under siege. People were extremely stressed, caught between those who resented the intimidating, brutal oppressors and those who were homegrown terrorists. Probably the prices of basic life commodities were rising beyond the reach of ordinary people. Tensions were high and God was about to do something! According to Mark "In those days Jesus came..." (v. 19). The clear intention of God is about to be revealed.

Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized. As Jesus came out of the water the heavens tore apart and the Spirit descended on him. The Spirit confirmed God was present in that moment. Were these spectacular happenings in fulfillment of ancient prophetic events, or is this narrative based on what Mark wanted us to know about Jesus? Three times Mark dramatically tells us who Jesus is—the Son of God (vv. 1:11, 9:7, and 15:39). This is a key message of Mark's Gospel. In the baptism of Jesus we see his obedience to God's will and the suffering that will lead to the cross. What does it mean for us to understand Jesus is the Son of God and follow his example of obedience to God?

After his baptism Jesus was taken into the wilderness where he was tempted for 40 days. Later John was arrested and then Jesus appeared in Galilee and proclaimed "the good news of God" (v. 14). Jesus, who has been declared the Son of God, is the good news.

Amid life's struggles and the stresses they cause, God in the form of Jesus says to us there is good news. Life can be hard and people can think there is no hope. Now is the time for God to speak and act. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news" (v. 15). The kingdom is something new. It is a different way to live. People had heard of repentance for the remission of sins (John's baptism). Here Jesus is saying the presence and reign of God is here. God is at work and you need to turn away from what you are doing and believe this reality. The people were looking for good news and here it was.

For us today, the peaceable reign of God can be a reality if we believe and work toward it. It can demand sacrifice (changing our priorities) from us, but the kingdom is calling. It is time to share the good news that the kingdom of God can be a reality today. To make this happen we engage in Christ's mission. How do you invite people to a relationship with Christ? How can we abolish poverty and end needless suffering? How can we pursue peace on Earth? How do we develop disciples to serve? How do we experience our congregations in mission? As we find answers to these questions and respond in Christ's mission, the reign of God will be a reality. God is near.

Throughout the Gospel of Mark we are shown what it means to follow Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah. It leads to suffering, death, and resurrection. It is not easy to follow Jesus but the goal is worth the cost.