

Lent 1, 18 February 2024 – Bishop Stephen Pickard
St Theodores Adelaide
Mark 1: 9-15

God appears when the time is ripe

Now after John the Baptist was arrested Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God and saying: ‘The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news’. **The time is fulfilled.** It’s a poor translation of the Greek. Fulfilled gives the sense of being completed. But its far more than that. More accurate to say, **‘The time is now filled up’.** Story about our plum tree – bursting with ripeness; ready to be plucked; juicy and sweet. Get there before the birds or our possum. ‘The time is ripe’; sweet time. When Jesus appears on the scene there is something exceedingly sweet, rich and ripe for the spiritual pallet.

The time is ripe? **But what time are we talking about? 12 O’clock local Galilee time in 33 AD?** It was the time when Herod was ruler of Galilee and Pilate was the Governor of Roman Judea. We can get a fairly good historical fix on the chronological time. But that’s not the time that is referred to in Mark’s Gospel. **The Gospel writer speaks of Kairos time not Chronos time;** the appropriate time not simply chronologically determined time. Kairos is the qualitative time of life. The Greeks considered it the most appropriate for something new. We are more familiar with Kairos time than you might care to think. We speak of a ‘Kairos moment’; ‘the appropriate time’; of someone visiting at a ‘good time’ or ‘just in time’; or ‘it couldn’t have happened at a worst time’; or of something being ‘timely’. We hear people speak of having ‘the time of their life’. All of these ways of being in time are more than mere chronological, linear time. The ordinary everyday lineal time is suffused and splattered with timely interventions; critical times, good timing. Times that are just so appropriate; times that are ripe with meaning and significance and surprise; times that infuse chronological time with something extra, sweetness, richness, novelty and power. Who does not know of such times?

Jesus appears at just such a time; a timely intervention from God! A Kairos moment within Chronos time. Henceforth we live in the time of the messiah. **From the appearing of Jesus on the stage of history we live in messianic time.** This is the time when the 'kingdom of God is at hand'; or 'the kingdom of God has come near'. What's that about? It's about God's rule; God's justice, God's loving compassion; God's constancy and joy has come near. This is a fundamental feature of Messianic time and it is very good news; it is the best news for all people, for the world, for countries and nations, for the planet.

The good news which Jesus proclaims is that in all the weft and warp of history; its terrors and constant violence and suffering that is another dimension if we would but seize the day. Jesus does not appear on the stage of history proclaiming, 'The end is nigh!' This is the message of apocalyptic culture and some forms of Christianity. Hollywood loves it. Rather Jesus appears and announces: 'The time is ripe; the kingdom of God is at hand'.

We live our lives in the time that remains. The time between now time and the end of Chronological time. How are we to use our time? What shall we do? How to live well in messianic time? These are questions for the season of Lent. And here's the thing. **Chronological time, lineal time gives us no rest.** It can be cruel. Either we grasp it as if there is no other time and seek power to rule the now time; or we despair that the end is just on the horizon and we are paralysed and vulnerable to all sorts of influences. **The disciple of Jesus is a creature of Chronos time** like everyone else. We too are subject to all the challenges, dangers and potentials common to human beings. But; and it is a crucial but, the disciple of Jesus has found a clue to life in Chronos time; not an escape but a deeper reality and it changes everything. The drum beat of messianic time is the rhythm for the Christian pilgrimage through time.

So, what are we called to do? How are we to live? Repent and believe in the good news? **Repent.** Metanoia – **literally change your mind!** Not beat your breast and say woe is me. But change your mind or more accurately allow your mind to be changed. As the Apostle Paul says; be transformed by the renewal of your mind (so that you may discern what is the will of God-what is good and acceptable and perfect'. Mind change; a change of mind. **Colloquially: 'Get a life'; a new life.** Repent: a 180 degree turn around. But more along the lines of a fresh orientation on life; one's own and others and the world. The spiritual writer Parker J Palmer in his wonderful book *Let Your Life Speak: listening for the voice of vocation* poses a question: Is the life you are living the life that wants to live in you? It's the kind of question that can be life changing; a new orientation, a new way of living in ordinary chronological time. It's a question for the season of Lent; especially Lent. A bit of soul searching is good for the soul and a lot more.

Make no mistake it's there in the life of Jesus in the Gospel today. In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. 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. And a voice came from heaven. The call came from heaven. The membrane between earth and heaven is punctured; the eternal Spirit of God breaks through; a word is heard; it is the voice of vocation. A call from above and beyond the realm of the everyday penetrates ordinary space and time. If it happens for Jesus Christ, then it is meant for us as well. Those times in our lives when the heavens are torn apart, when the membrane between heaven and earth is punctured; when we are caught up in something bigger, stranger and we hear God calling.

And Jesus is driven by the Spirit into the wilderness; tested and tried and shaped and strengthened and consoled. A time for soul searching; what's the life that can, ought,

must live in Jesus? If this is the experience of the earthly Jesus so too it will be the experience of those who follow.

Then comes to the task; to bear witness to the closeness of the Divine: 'The time is ripe, the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news'.

Here is the pattern of Jesus life; here is the pattern of those who follow in the footsteps of Christ. The pattern is simple: call, testing, task. And it is repeated over and over and over again in the normal Christian life. Why? Because we lose our way; we forget how to listen; we flee the inevitable testing and trials of life; we ignore the task.

This Sunday marks the First Sunday of Lent, 2024. The Gospel reading reminds us that Lent is the time to listen for the call; a time for the heavens to be torn apart again; a time to be reminded of the life that wants to live in us; a time to ponder what we have learnt from the trials and testing of the life we have lived; a time to hear again the task before us; a time to live a life as if the kingdom of God has indeed drawn near to us; a time to get a life again; a time to live a life worth living. The time is ripe for such things. Perhaps today we listen to the question posed by Parker J Parker: Is the life I am living the life that wants to live in me? What might be something we need to leave behind for the sake of something even more precious and significant? In what direction might we need to turn to reorientate ourselves. This is deeply personal, but it is also deeply social; economic, political. The good news of Jesus leaves no stone unturned. So today let us hear the good news: The time is now ripe; God's loving ways have drawn near to us; let us turn again to follow the path that leads to life and let us gladly believing the good news; and believe in such a way that we live the good news.