



The Second Sunday of Advent
The Rev. Jonathan Stepp
December 6, 2020

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A man goes to God and says, “is it true what it says in today’s reading from 2 Peter, that to you, O Lord, ‘one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day’?”

And the Lord says, “yes, my son.” Thinking he could therefore pick up an easy thousand dollars, the man says “well if that’s your perspective on numbers, how about giving me one dollar” and God replies “sure, just give me one day to get it for you.”

If we take St. Peter’s letter literally (and I’m not sure we’re meant to), from God’s perspective it has been about two days since today’s Gospel, the Gospel of Mark, was written – and it’s been two thousand years to us. Since we are, with this Advent season, beginning a year of reading our way through Mark’s Gospel, passage by passage each Sunday, I thought it might be good for us to pause for a moment and think about those very clear words with which Mark opens his book: “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

The phrase “good news” is the literal translation of the Greek word, “evangelion.” The other English translation for “evangelion” is the word “gospel.” So, this is the beginning of the gospel – the good news – of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It’s from this word that we get the name of this book, The Gospel of Mark – or, to translate it another way, Mark’s Book about the Good News of Jesus Christ.

But what sort of book is this? Is it a biography of Jesus? Is it an historical account of his ministry? Or perhaps a theological treatise on who Jesus is? In reality, each of the Gospels, including Mark’s Gospel, is all of these things and none of them. In fact, Gospels are really their own genre of literature. Just as we have more familiar genres of literature, such as poetry, history, or biography, so we have in the Gospel writings a unique genre which can only be accurately labeled as its own genre of literature – a genre called “Gospel.”

Gospels such as Mark's have characteristics of biography, history, theology, and even poetry, but Gospels also have their own unique characteristics which are important to understand if we are going to make the most of our Sunday readings for the next year. What makes Gospels uniquely their own genre of literature is the purpose for which they were written. They were written to evangelize the reader. The word "evangelize," like the word "gospel", has its origins in the Greek word "evangelion." To say it in Greek, one evangelizes using the evangelion. Or, to say it in English, one "good newses" using the "good news" or one "gospelizes" using the "gospel."

The Gospels were written in order to immerse their readers in the good news of Jesus Christ. Immersing people in the good news of Jesus means telling them some of his biography, but not all of it. Immersing people in the good news of Jesus means recounting some of the history of Jesus' ministry, but not an exhaustive history. And it means discussing some of the theology of Jesus, but not all of it.

In contrast to these other genres of literature, Gospels attempt to create an experience through the written word in which the readers – people like you and me – actually encounter the risen and living Christ through the Holy Spirit's interpretation of the words written on the page. Gospels are unique in all of human literature in this regard. They are not meant to be read alone, but rather they are meant to be read together with the Holy Spirit. They are not meant to only give us an account of past events but to allow us to enter into those events and to meet Jesus for ourselves. The Gospels do not just tell us who Jesus was, they invite us to be open to meeting Jesus for ourselves, in the here and now, through their words.

If we were to allow the Gospels to gospelize us, if we were to allow ourselves to be evangelized by Mark's evangelion of Jesus Christ, what would we see and experience?

First of all, the Gospels are a revelation to us of God's love. In Jesus' words, his teaching, and his actions we are seeing a revelation of who God is – and that revelation is the reality that God is love. Love isn't just something that God does, it is something that God is. The Gospels reveal to us the active, creative love between the Father and the Son and they reveal to us that we are included in that love.

Secondly, since Jesus is God in the flesh, walking among us as one of us, the Gospels reveal to us that there is no other God hiding behind Jesus' back. What we see with Jesus is what God really is – there are no nasty surprises awaiting us down the road. Once we have seen Jesus in the Gospels, we have seen the Father and the Holy Spirit as well.

Finally, the Gospels reveal to us that Jesus is sharing his relationship with God with us. As he is The Beloved Child of God, so we also are all beloved children of God. As he prays, we also can pray. As he loves God and loves others, so also we can love. As he has hope in God's faithfulness, so also we can have hope.

A journey into this revelation is what begins for us today with the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ according to Mark. The journey is familiar to us, we have been on it before, and most of us have been on this journey many times over the years as we have moved through the annual cycles of Gospel readings in the life of the Church. Because we have been on this journey before, we know that each time we embark on this path we are sure to discover new and unexpected revelations of God's love, the truth of Jesus' identity, and our place in the life of the Trinity. Each time we travel through another one of the Gospels we learn more deeply and fully how much we are loved and embraced into the life of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

I ask you to open your hearts and minds to what Mark will share with us in the Sundays ahead. At times we will take short detours, often to hear the gospel according to John, and occasionally to hear it according to Matthew and Luke, but mainly we will hear from Mark this coming year. I ask you to open your hearts and minds to a renewed immersion into the good news of Jesus, the good news that God is love and we are all of us swimming in that love every moment of our lives.

May we allow ourselves to be gospelized by this gospel and transformed even more deeply by the revelation of the good news of this love.

Amen.