

4 February 2018  
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church

Jesu Juva

“Preaching the Kingdom of God”

Text: Mark 1:29-39; 1 Corinthians 9:16-27; Isaiah 40:21-31

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

Jesus wants to preach. With His words and with His deeds.

In the beginning, God preached. He spoke. And out of nothing all things came into being.

In the time of the Old Testament, God preached. Through patriarchs and prophets. And He created a people, a nation, and gave them a kingdom.

***Do you not know? Do you not hear?*** Isaiah asked. Stop, look, and listen to God’s preaching and what He has done. For you. Or are you too busy? Are your eyes too filled with the glitter of this world to see, and your ears with the words of men to hear?

*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel* (Mark 1:15). That, Mark tells us, is what John the Baptist preached. It is also what Jesus preached. For the truth is the same no matter who preaches it. It is Mark’s way of channeling Isaiah. It is Mark’s way of saying: stop, look, and listen. Stop what you’re doing, open your eyes, and hear the Word of the Lord.

The people in Galilee *did*. And as we heard last week, they were amazed and astonished. Yes, Isaiah, they heard the kingdom of God. They saw the kingdom of God. Not a foretaste of the feast to come, as we so often say. But there, a foretaste of the resurrection to come! Unclean spirits forced to leave the bodily homes they were squatting in. Fevers submitting to the touch of Jesus. And more. They saw, they heard, they believed. The kingdom of God *was there*. In Galilee.

And then it was gone. The next morning *He* was gone. ***Everyone is looking for you***, Simon told Jesus. But Jesus was not in the town. He was out in ***a desolate place***. Praying. And He was ready to ***go on to the next towns***, to preach there also. For Jesus wants to preach. With His words and with His deeds.

Was the kingdom of God leaving that place? Perhaps those who came that next day, bringing more people for healing, thought so. Perhaps Simon didn’t understand why Jesus would leave when things were going so well. But the kingdom was not leaving, **it**

**was spreading.** Those who saw, those who heard, those who were healed, would continue to speak of what happened that day, even as Jesus began to preach and do the kingdom in the next towns. No, the kingdom of God was here to stay. It is the kingdom of darkness that was leaving. Being overcome by the Lord of life.

But the kingdom of darkness does not give up so easily. Demons forced out of their homes find new homes in which to dwell. And maybe they change their tactics, too. So that by the time Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthian churches, the darkness he sees isn't fevers and the same kind of demon possession - it is the darkness of division, factions, and cliques within the churches.

He mentions them in the very first chapter of this letter that we heard from today. How people were saying I follow Paul, or I follow Apollos, or I follow Cephas (1 Cor 1:12). But just as John and Jesus preached the same message, so too, says Paul, do we. The message of Christ crucified and risen from the dead. That preaching has power, not the men who preach it. Division is the devil's game. Divide and conquer.

We heard it last week, too, when Paul said that the strong don't divide themselves from the weak, but serve them.

And this week, too. Paul says he *has to* preach. And he has to preach to all people. He preaches to the Jews, he preaches to those under the law, he preaches to those outside the law, he preaches to those who are weak. He preaches to all, no matter who they are; where they are. He "becomes" them, so that they might become as he is, a child of God. United to Christ.

Jesus came for all, so Paul goes to all, and gives it his all. Like an athlete, he says. And in Greece, where Corinth was, they - like we, on this Super Bowl Sunday - they loved their athletes. Look at them, Paul says. Look at how they do it. Should we not be the same? And even more, since the prize we seek is so much greater? ***So run that you may obtain it.***

*Run that you may obtain it.*

When I was in High School and College I was a cross country runner. And one of the things we did every meet was make sure we knew where we were going. Which sounds kind of obvious, but was important. On a track, it's easy. On your own course, it's easy. But when you go to someone else's - enemy territory, so to speak - and you're running through their cornfields and woods, it's not so easy. And if you run down the wrong path, you're not going to win. Part of running well is running in the right direction; running to the right place.

*So where are we running?*

In our world today, we're running all over the place, right? We're busier than ever. But the more we run, the farther behind we seem to get, the more tired we feel. Could it be that we're not running the right way? We're running, but we don't know where? What are we running toward? What are we running *from*?

And could this be the new tactic of the kingdom of darkness for us today? To get us running down the wrong paths? To get us running . . . but we don't know where?

To the people of Capernaum that day, it might have seemed as if Jesus was running away from them. Maybe that's what Simon thought, too. But it was not so. Jesus wasn't running *from* them, but *for* them. He was running to the cross. To preach . . . there. With His words and with His deeds. Because if He was going to save them, it wouldn't be in Capernaum, like that; it would be on the cross. On the cross where Jesus *became* sin for us, so that we might *become* the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor 5:21).

That was the finish line for Jesus, His goal. And so it is ours as well. That is where we stop, look, and listen, and see and hear the kingdom of God; the glory of God. His love. His forgiveness.

So when Paul says *run that you may obtain it*, he is not telling them - or us - to just try harder or run faster. He is telling us to run in the right direction. To run to the cross of Jesus; where His cross is for us today. To run to our baptism, to run to the Word, to run to absolution, to run to the altar, and *there* receive the prize. There receive our Saviour. For as Paul said: *only one receives the prize*. And that was Jesus. But He won it, so that we could have it. All of us. He won it, to give it to you.

*Only one receives the prize*. Only one could. Paul thought he could; that his all would be enough. But he found out later that his all could never be enough. But that Jesus' all was more than enough. And that Jesus' all included him and was for him. And from that day on, he knew the path to run down. He knew which direction to run. And he knew he had to preach it. But that his preaching was really God preaching, through him. For it was God's Word that he spoke, after all.

And that Word, that preaching, has now come to us. That we too may see and hear the kingdom of God. That, as Isaiah proclaimed,

*Even youths shall faint and be weary,  
and young men shall fall exhausted;  
but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;  
they shall run and not be weary;  
they shall walk and not faint.*

It sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? But maybe we should try it. Maybe we'll be surprised. Maybe we'll find the promises of God are true after all.

Not that your life will be easy and everything you ever wanted. If that's what you're running for, that's the wrong path. Because the kingdom of God looks like a cross and comes through the cross. But where the cross is, Jesus is. And where Jesus is just might be the peace and joy and strength and hope you need.

And so Jesus goes to Capernaum, and to Judea, Nazareth, Samaria, and here. To preach. He wants to preach. To preach and do His kingdom in you. And through you. That His kingdom spread into all the world and into every home and every heart.

And though Mark doesn't tell us what Jesus prayed for when He left Capernaum and was out in that desolate place, I'll bet He was praying for that. *Thy kingdom come*. That the kingdom of God would grow in Capernaum. That all would hear, and hearing believe, and believing live. A life that no sickness or demon can end. A life victorious over sin, death, devil, and grave. The life of Christ preached into you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.