

“Got a faith? It doesn’t matter!” Mark 1:14-20

“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.”

Our today’s Gospel reading is about the very beginning of Jesus ministry and about Him calling His first disciples. There is a lot we could learn from this section. Some things are more important for us today, some are less.

Today we’ll focus mostly on Jesus message as it is written down by Mark and will see how it is relevant for us today. So, Jesus message and its relevance for us today.

“After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

As we can see Jesus said four things: ‘the time is fulfilled’; ‘the kingdom of God is at hand’; ‘repent’; ‘believe in the Gospel’. We’ll look at each of them one after another.

‘The time is fulfilled’. What does it mean? The time is fulfilled. What do we think about time? Generally today in our Western culture we have this idea of progress. It may be more hidden or more obvious, but it is still here.

The idea is that we are progressing towards something better... I guess towards better future. We just need to keep striving and one day we’ll get there. This idea was especially strong in the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century, with all the rapid development of science and technology.

Then two world wars reminded that even if technology has changed and has become more powerful, our hearts are still the same. Not much progress. If we look to the world around us we can conclude that the same is so true even today.

This is also how things look from God’s perspective; we are not progressing towards better future. Sure, we as humanity keep accumulating more and more knowledge that helps us to cope better living in this world, but we ourselves – we do not change.

We do not progress to be better people. Essentially we are no different that people thousand or three thousand years ago. In fact, it doesn't matter.

Because from God's perspective the most important thing in the history of this world has already happened. The time has been fulfilled. What had to happen has already happen. When we may wonder? When Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God the Creator Himself became one of us. That was the fulfilment of the time.

We know the story. He became a man, lived among us, was crucified and rouse again. Why? So that He can reveal Himself, and so that we can learn what kind of person true God is.

We often say, God is love and this is true. But we need to add, that He is self-sacrificial love. Love for the sake of other. We can say that He is love for sake of you. For each of you. He came to fix what was broken by sin, that is – us, and our relationships with Him.

This is what God calls the fulfilment of the time. This was the most important thing to happen. When He put aside His divine majesty to be with us and to prepare the way for us to receive His forgiveness and true life, eternal live with our Creator.

Now it is done. It is finished. Now we live in this time of God's grace and patience simply waiting for Christ's return and complete renewal of heaven and earth. The time is fulfilled, there is nothing more that has to happen.

"The kingdom of God is at hand." What is this Kingdom of God? When we hear the work 'kingdom' we usually think about some place, some geographical territory.

This is not what Jesus means when He says 'the Kingdom of God'. Much more fitting would be to day 'the active reign of God'. And this reign implies presence of the King Himself, where He comes and reigns in this world.

Jesus reign is different from what we are used to see in this world. Yes, He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, but His power is shown not by subduing this world, but by transforming and restoring it.

He does not force His will upon us, instead, with His love and service to us He changes our hearts. He changes us from inside. While rulers of this world make the world obedient by laws and force, Jesus does it by changing our wills.

Of course, you can force someone to do something you want, but this is only external rule. It is not a true rule, for there is no true allegiance, only coercion. It is totally different, when the hearts are changed.

Then there is no force needed. Then you will do for your King whatever is needed because you love Him and desire to make Him happy, as He has loved you and made you happy. This is how God's kingdom operates.

Once you begin to learn of Jesus undeserved love towards you, you can't be the same. When someone loves you so much as to give up His life so that you can live, that changes us, it puts things in a different perspective. This is how we begin to experience the Kingdom of God in our lives.

See, the first two things from Jesus message were simply statements about new reality that has dawned with the coming of Jesus. The time is fulfilled and the reign of God has begun.

Then He actually commands something to His listeners and by extension also to us. He says only two things. "*Repent and believe in the gospel.*" That's it. The first one is simply 'repent'.

This is not a very good translation of the original Greek word. Original meaning would be more along the lines of 'repent' is a sense of changing your mindset, changing the way you look at things. Changing your mind by realizing how God sees us, when He sees our hearts, thoughts, everything.. so that it leads to repentance.

Did you notice that there is one interesting detail? What do we need to repent of? Can you tell? "*Repent and believe in the Gospel.*" So, what do we need to repent of?

It is not specified. When we hear 'repent' we start to think about what do I need to repent of? If you were standing before God, and this is, in fact, where you are now, and if He commanded you 'repent' what would come in your mind?

Have I neglected the Lord? Ignored Him? Have I run after all other things leaving my God as the last on my priority list? Have I been enslaved to my passions?

Greed, envy, jealousy? Maybe it is about my thirst for power, for sex, for fame, for entertainment? Maybe it is about my idleness and sloth? Have I abused my authority, by humiliating others?

Have I rebelled against those above me? Maybe this is about abortions, maybe about violence, maybe about cheating on your spouse, maybe about divorce, maybe about not so transparent and honest business deals.

Maybe I need to repent from talking behind the backs and telling things that may not exactly correspond to the truth? We would like to specify what we need to repent of, for then we can try to do it. And then we are good.

But Jesus doesn't give us these options. He does not highlight something specific. Instead He simply commands 'repent!' This implies all of the above and whatever else we are guilty of. It implies our whole lives.

For He doesn't ask us simply to repent from something we have done, or haven't done, He commands us to change our mindset.

How? From focusing to ourselves, to focusing on Christ and our neighbour, He demands us to become new people. If He wanted, He could have made endless list of reproaches for each of us. This is now why Jesus comes to us.

This is not why He sends His messengers. This is not why we are here today. By His command 'repent' He urges us to recognize how broken and corrupted our lives have been.

He doesn't point to our failures, we know of them anyway, Jesus invites us to receive what He in His love has prepared. This is what this 'repent' means. To turn away from our old ways and turn to Jesus Christ.

That's why He says: "Believe in the Gospel!" What is the Gospel? The good news that God whom we didn't know, against whom we rebelled in so many ways, has reconciled us to Himself and opened doors to His eternal Kingdom through Jesus Christ.

We don't deserve it, yes, but it is given to us as a gift, as soon as we are willing and desire to receive it. This is how we could summarize what the Gospel is. Now, and this is interesting. Think about it!

When we hear 'repent', we tend to specify – repent of what? But when we hear 'believe', people don't want to specify. No, not at all. How many times you have heard people saying that they have their faith.

May be you try to bring them to the truth, to the Christ, and they will say: "I have my faith." Really? You have your faith? And what is this supposed to mean? I have my faith.

There is a very important reason why Jesus said: "Believe in the Gospel!" He didn't say: "Have your faith!" You see, the point is - it is not your faith as such that can help when the last day comes. It is what you have faith in, the object of your faith that matters.

Our faith is only a hand that grabs to our Saviour. If you are sinking it is not the strength of your hand that saves you, it is the strength of your Saviour. Right? Someone other than you.

Saying that I have my own faith is the same as to grab your own cloth when you are sinking. It really doesn't matter how strong you grab them. It doesn't matter.

You may have very strong faith in your good life, or in your life spent caring for your family, or in your life spent trying to live according God's will. It doesn't matter.

You may believe in all of these – and none of them will help when Christ returns. On the other hand, your faith can be just as a little spark in your hearth, but if you believe in the Gospel, this is more than enough.

For then it is not your faith, but God Himself who takes care of you. You see, once we understand that not our faith as such, but only the right object of our faith, the Son of God, Jesus Christ can deliver to us forgiveness and life, it gives us such a wonderful comfort and assurance.

You see, your situation before God doesn't depend on you. No. For you can't do much anyway. But Jesus Christ has done everything for you. For you. Say it – 'He has done it for me. I don't need to worry about it.' Keep saying it to yourself. This is the Gospel.

And you can't lose your salvation either, for it is God's gift to you, and nothing can change His attitude towards you. Unless you reject it. He knows what kind of person you are, what you have done, thought and spoken, and what you will do, say, and think. It is not going to change His heart for you.

So dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Here we are, joined together in the Holy Spirit with Christ and with one another. We are here for we have believed in the Gospel.

Even if our faith is as little as a mustard seed, and even if we are such a mess ourselves, we still can rejoice for our standing before God doesn't depend on us, or on our faith, but on the unshakable foundation of Jesus Christ.

Therefore rejoice! **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."**

Amen.