

## *Jesus Came Into Galilee*

*Text: Mark 1:14-20*

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**There are many movies about the life of Jesus.** Most recently, *The Passion of the Christ* elicited much controversy. *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Godspell* put their takes on the life of Jesus to rock and roll. *Jesus of Montreal* was an artsy, edgy take on how people in 20<sup>th</sup> century Western culture might treat Jesus. I can't say that I'm an aficionado of Jesus films by any means, but someone pointed me toward Pasolini's 1964 black and white film called *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* and I went to view pieces of it on YouTube. I found myself taken by the intense dialogue, the stark settings, and especially the way people breathlessly try to keep up with this charismatic figure of Jesus.

You can just imagine this compelling Jesus—with people drawn to his energy, drawn to his message, drawn to his person—you can just imagine this compelling Jesus come into Galilee in our Scripture today saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Believe in the gospel. The good news. God is with us. The kingdom, the reign, the rule of God, is at hand!

Gospel. Good news. So often we allow the idea of “gospel,” of good news, the gospel that Jesus taught and lived, to get lost. In that respect, the word gospel is like many other good words of the Christian faith, so taken for granted that you've got to do an archaeological dig to find it again!

And so today I propose to shovel down through some of the layers which have been heaped upon the word *gospel*, and we'll try to get down to where we can use it again!

**I suppose that the immediate things we think of when we hear the word *gospel* is that it is a churchy word—“churchese” if you will.** We use the word *gospel* when we refer to one of the first four books of the New Testament, which are portraits of Jesus' life. We use the word *gospel* as part fo our “churchese” to talk about what is really important to us in our faith. For instance, we might say, “The real meaning of the gospel is...” And this is good stuff.

But so often *gospel* becomes just another religious word that points to something out there—a scripture lesson over here, a concept over there. You see, when *gospel* is no longer good news that God brings into my life or your life, then we've got a problem!

For the last 30 years at least, AA has made a big deal about the difference between spirituality and religion. They look upon spirituality as one's intimate relationship with God, with one's Higher Power, which is something you practice day in, day out, 24/7.

But on the other hand, AA sees religion as just the outer trappings of spirituality—as just rituals, symbols, and abstract ideas which may or may not contribute to one's spirituality.

How is it in your life? Is *gospel* just religion, something you can take or leave? Or is it spirituality? Let it be a relationship with God, let it be the Jesus Path you and I walk each and every day!

**\*\* Let's dig down a little farther in our archeological dig. Another layer of meaning that might be heaped upon the word *gospel* in our minds is that we say, "Well, what the gospel really comes down to is the Golden Rule—do unto others as you would have them do unto you."**

That's great when it works—when we take the time to help push a stranger's car out of the snowbank, or when the neighbor takes his snowblower and does our driveway as well as his. Then, yes, it feels like gospel, it feels like good news, it feels like a taste of God's kingdom!

But what about the times when we don't carry out the Golden Rule, when we say something to someone that cuts them like a knife and then we twist the knife for good measure, or when someone holds a grudge against us and we get suckered into holding a grudge against them? What about the times when it's really easier to "do unto others before you get done unto"?

If the Golden Rule is our only gospel and we blow it, then the Golden Rule becomes just another rule, just another burden upon us, weighing us down instead of setting us free. And that is not good news either!

**A last layer of the meaning of the word *gospel* that I want to talk about today is the image of a Bible-thumping, hellfire-and-brimstone, pulpit-pounding preacher under the glare of television lights.**

Now I believe that we need to share the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. But does that mean we must ladle all sorts of guilt on people who may be struggling to get free from guilt as it is? Does that mean that we have to cram our faith down their throats, instead of holding it out as an invitation to life, Real Life?

I don't think so—that's not good news! It was such an invitation that Jesus made in our Scripture today that Simon and Andrew immediately left their nets and followed Jesus, that James and John immediately left their boats and followed Jesus. As one translation even puts it, "Bang! Immediately they left their nets and followed him."

**I think every church needs to figure out four things for themselves:**

- Why do people need God?
- Why do people need Jesus?
- Why do people need the Church?
- And why do people need this Church?

Here is my quick take on them. First, Why do people need God? Because, as the Apostle Paul told the people of Athens, "In God we live and move and have our being." Because we are creatures and have the opportunity to relate to the Creator. And because we know there is Wonder, there is Calling, there is More to life, More with a capital M.

Second, Why do people need Jesus? Because he called the labored and heavy-burdened to him, and that's us sometimes. Because he ate with both the religious and with sinners, and that's us sometimes. Because he embodies the deep, deep love of God that loves us right where we are, and loves us enough not to keep us there. And because he challenges us, saying, "To whom much is given, much is required."

Third, Why do people need the Church? Because we are stronger together than apart. Because at our best we live Christian community instead of just mouth the words.

And fourth, Why do people need this Church? Because we believe the Church is called to live God's kingdom of hope now, even though we blow it often enough. Why do people need this Church? Because we believe that the spiritual gospel and the social gospel go together, that prayer and action go together, that the prophetic and the pastoral go together, that mind and heart go together, that heart-felt faith and deep questioning go together, that innovation and tradition go together, that experience & reason & Scripture go together.

**There is gospel! There IS good news! What is the gospel of Jesus Christ?**

It is the truth that God is near, that the kingdom of God is at hand, is so close we can taste it.

It is the truth that we can be changed from the inside out, that Jesus' call to repent is less a matter of looking at our brokenness and weeping, than it is looking at what possibilities God sets before us and saying WOW!

To me, it is the truth that through this Jesus on the cross we are set free, this Christ in whom we see God, upon whom was heaped the denial of Peter, the betrayal of Judas, the fickleness of the mob, the cold calculations of the political and religious leaders, and who still said "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Here we see the heart of God for you, for me, for a world often in such conflict with each other.

The gospel is also the truth that we do not set out on the path alone, but that Jesus calls to you, to me, to all: "Follow me."

Some hear it in the middle of the night. Some hear it as they see how science can improve the lives of many. Some hear it as a great-aunt fills in for their mother who is gravely ill. Some hear it in the face of one who is mistreated, or in the swirl of events in their world. How do you hear it?

Maybe you've followed the 16-year-old young man, Jack Jablonsky, from Benilde-St. Margaret's who was injured in a hockey game 3 weeks ago and couldn't feel his body. The doctor's diagnosis is that he will not walk again and will have limited use of his arms.

It is heart-breaking, but he wants to start his junior year with his classmates at Benilde-St. Margaret's in the fall, he wants to go to college, he wants to work in a career related to hockey. He told the Star-Tribune that it's uncomfortable not knowing what the future holds, but for that matter nobody does.

"Whatever normal is at the time, I have to accept it," he said. "This is like a calling almost. It's a mystery, but at the same time it's got to mean something."

Jack Jablonsky's depth is something for us all to learn from. What is your calling in your deepest heart?