

## SERMON

Mark 1:14-20

The Kingdom of God has Drawn Near

Nunawading and Waverley, 23-1-21

Dear friends in Christ,

Jesus arrived in Galilee preaching like an ancient prophet: **The time has been fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near**, though, unlike the prophets, he added, **believe in the gospel**. This was a dangerous thing to do because there was already an empire and Christ was proclaiming a rival kingdom. Was he a threat to Rome, which already had its divine Caesar? Jesus is a threat to any human-established kingdom.

It is a strange thing to realise that all governments, elections, and institutions will come to an end. The school you attend, the council which collects your rubbish bins, will go, be redeemed and replaced with a completely new organisation, God's kingdom.

At the moment, the kingdom of God arrives via preaching, since it is **the gospel of God**, as Mark says, and we receive it by faith. As the Spirit comes into our lives, he brings with him all the eternal gifts of Christ, all his promises of life and forgiveness. The Spirit also tries to modify what is going on in lives. The love of Christ for us leads to loving relationships, resolving marriage issues and being reconciled with those who antagonise us. His truth creates in us a desire for justice and for political change. When we are justified by faith through the redemption of the cross and resurrection, we know there is hope for all. Christians want to rehabilitate prisoners, feed the hungry, and help those in need. We cannot let the environment be destroyed or see politics dissolve into endless wrangling. We work for change. Yet, the kingdom is something that has to come from God; it has to remove the old and replace it with something new, as we say in the Lord's Prayer.

Our frustration is that **it is near** yet not here. It is by faith and Christ is for us and within us, **the hope of glory**. However, its physical and visible reality has not arrived.

Our example is Christ. He was baptised but though he had this tremendous experience of his Father's declaration of love and the Spirit coming down on him like a dove, it was followed by wilderness and temptation. Then he waited and waited for his Father to move but nothing happened. The signal eventually came with John's imprisonment. The church will need to go through testing, temptation and trials before the visible reality of the kingdom is before us.

However, something amazing and grand is taking place right now. We hold out for people Christ's offer of **repentance**. It is the chance to begin all over again, the chance to be reborn. Their past can be removed, their lives purified and be given the promise of entry into the kingdom as royal children. The gospel is God's amnesty, his offer of peace and redemption to people under judgement and immanent destruction in hell. In Christ, **the kingdom of God has drawn near**. He is not far from the people of this world. Already, he has begun to establish God's reign over the earth, a reign that begins with good news and the call to repentance. It **is near** because Jesus is near.

I get excited by the daily news and buying and selling, fixing things and problem solving. It is easy to get really absorbed by it all but our daily activity should be seen like the stock market before the crash. Everyone is exuberant, the good times will last and then the wreck arrives. I do not mean to be depressing but it is necessary for us to realise we have membership in a different kingdom. Our shares are in something that is beautiful and will last. If our lives, our greatest investment is there we do not have to be absorbed by all that is going on around us. Involved, yes, but not absorbed. The daily news cycle is not news; it is what it is, a cycle, a churning of typical human behaviours, fads, curiosities, threats, and disasters. It is the same old, same old. However, we belong to something that is truly new in our world. God has met us, we know him, his character and sacrifice for us. We know his desire is to incorporate us into his life and his world where **the last become the first**, the lowest are lifted up and those exalting themselves are brought down. Everything around us is on the way out, or at least the way those things are being run. The troubles will go because Christ endured them. The stupidities and incompetence will go because Christ paid the price for them. Worn out lives will go because Christ has beaten death. Something truly amazing and new has come and we are the ones in the know. Our job is to get that out in the open.