

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge
Sermon- Mark 1:1-8
Sunday, December 10, 2017

Good News

1. Karl Barth, German theologian from the early 20th century, said that pastors should preach with the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. I have heard this so many times that it almost sounds like good advice. Of course, Barth was also a heretic, so I don't really care what he has to say.
2. I only mention this because Bonnie and I hit a point several years ago where we intentionally don't follow the news. We canceled cable. We don't get any tv stations. We pretty much have Netflix and Amazon Video. We both used to listen to talk radio any time we were in the car. Now, Bonnie always has the radio off, and I am usually listening to an audiobook.
3. We stopped with the news because it is nothing but bad news. When we followed the news, most of which was political, it was always about how horrible things were. The president, the country, cops, civil rights, Christmas, and on and on. Everything is bad news. Everything is under attack.
 - a. I would much rather preach with my bible in both hands and know that I am preaching nothing but the word of God.
4. As we have moved into the season of Advent again, we have returned to Mark as being the gospel of focus for the next year. I love how his gospel account opens. Mark 1:1, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Probably the reason why he opens this way is that it was common for books to not be titled the way we give all books titles now.
5. Mark calls it the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ even though the book takes us all the way to the resurrection. Mark had an understanding that what he was writing wasn't a comprehensive account of the impact Jesus would have on the world. This is only the beginning of the gospel of Jesus because his works continue, indeed have continued on for 2000 years so far, and we are expecting much bigger works when he returns.
6. Then Mark calls this the *gospel* of Jesus Christ. Gospel means good news or good message. The gospel is truly good news because it is the announcement of God's love for his creation. He loves those whom he made in his image so much that he wasn't about to leave them in their sins to die apart from his love. Instead, he rescued them through the blood sacrifice of his Son, Jesus. The gospels herald that good news to us like an old-time newspaper salesman calling out the headlines to garner the interest of would be readers.
 - a. "Extra, extra. Read all about it. Creator of the universe loves his people so much that he redeems them at great cost to himself!"
7. This gospel, Mark tells us, is of Jesus Christ, the son of God. This is a significant title applied to Jesus. His actual name was only Jesus, or Yeshua/Iesous (depending on the language). Christ isn't his last name, but the Greek form of the Jewish title Messiah, which means anointed one. Jesus was anointed by God to be the deliverer of his people. But he isn't just the Christ, as if he were merely some human who had God's anointing. He is also the Son of God. He is a divine being, the eternal Son and second person of the Trinity.
8. That first verse tells us so much about the content and the subject of the book Mark set forth to write.

Even the bad news is Good News

1. I mentioned that gospel means good news. There are two additional ways that we should consider that the gospel is good news. The gospel is good news in light of the all the bad which Jesus suffered, and it is good news in light of the never-ending bad news of this world.
2. When we read through the gospel accounts, they aren't only filled with stories of an amazing man being greeted jubilantly everywhere he went. Early in his ministry the crowds were large, mainly because they wanted miracles from him. As his teachings became more difficult, his crowds dwindled. By the time of his death, his followers probably numbered under one hundred.
3. The gospel accounts are filled with hostility towards Jesus, challenges to his authority and even his right to perform miracles, rejection, slander, brutality, and a bloody death. Yet, Mark calls it good news, and it is. Even if those things don't seem so good for Jesus, they are great for us. It is only because he faced all that he faced that we are able to be reconciled to the heavenly Father from whom our sins have left us estranged. His pain, his humiliation, his suffering, and his death provide the greatest news for us- that we have an eternal future when we had none.
4. The other ways that we should consider the gospel to be good news is as we compare it to our world. When we watch the news we hear of murder, rape, terrorism, war, and all types of ungodliness and misery. Apart from the gospel, where would we find hope? Hollywood has tried to overtake God as being the moral authority and the hope of the world, and we have learned over the last month or two that Hollywood is even more depraved than we ever imagined with all the sexual misconduct and assaults which we have learned about recently.
5. If we had to find our hope in the news of this world, then the news would be bad indeed. But our hope comes from the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, which tells us that we are loved, we are forgiven, we are adopted, and we are reconciled, no matter what is going on in the world around us.