

Sermon by Alan Hindmarch for Sunday 24th January

Break, O Lord, your word, as bread to our souls, and may the words of my lips and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable in your sight: O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Mark 1: 2 The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe the good news.

Many years ago I was in Middlesbrough when I was stopped by a young lady. She asked, "Have you got the time?" I looked at my watch and gave her the time. I realised from her facial reaction that what she meant was something totally outside of my sphere of thinking. Jesus said that the time had come. The clock had struck midnight and a new day had dawned. What new day? The Kingdom of God is near. The Prophets had told long ago that Israel would be re-established as a kingdom. They had been exiled and scattered, they had been split. Now they were under occupation. The people looked for the homeland to be theirs once again. The prophecies were often interpreted in this singular way. However, there was the distinct message that there would be one who would come and establish a much wider kingdom for ever.

Jesus was saying that that time had arrived. Many were still looking for defeat of the Roman occupiers and the establishment of the kingdom of Israel. We are under occupation of covid-19 and have been waiting for news of vaccines that were being developed. We thank God that vaccines are now approved and being distributed. I have had both my jabs. Many are waiting for the call to be vaccinated. However, the worst isn't over. Care must still be taken on a high level. My wife, with her heart problem, has been shielding since last March. We are looking to the future with hope.

Jesus went on to say that the kingdom of God had come near. We all have our own vision of the kingdom. Since the presence of Jesus brought the kingdom near so we believe that by his death and resurrection he opened it to all who believe in him. I believe that we, who believe, are part of that kingdom now.

Jesus went on to say that people needed to repent and believe the good news. A response was required. They have to do something about it. We all know the story of the couple who were lost on a country road. They asked a local person the way to the town. The reply, "If I was going there I wouldn't start from here!" Not very helpful. Jesus, in effect, was saying, "You're going the wrong way. You need to turn round." The first step is then to believe the good news. The Saviour is present. Turn to Him. From what? The People had become so consumed with obeying the commandments, together with all the interpretations that the scribes had added over the centuries, that many had lost the reason for them. This was to help them to love God and their neighbour.

WE are believing that the vaccine is the way forward, but we still have to behave in the right way to prevent the spread of the virus. We want to go back to normality. I don't believe that we will go backwards. I believe that we will move forward and find a new normality. We long for that day.

Jesus needed to get the message of God's love to many more people and so he went on to choose those who would be at the centre of this work. He chose the most unlikely team. He began with fishermen, usually not learned people and went on to invite tax gatherers – regarded at the time as thieves and renegades. Such People were left with the Gospel or Good News after Jesus had ascended. We often think that we are not good enough or capable of sharing such a thing. Think of some of the people that God used. Jacob -thief and liar; David – adulterer and murderer; and now - fishermen - low in society and not very learned: Paul – a total enemy of Christians. I could go on. If such people could be used by God what does that say of you and me. Who are we to judge ourselves, or other people? I pray that we may recognise that the time is now, and that it is urgent. We must pray that God will show us the right way to use the time. Perhaps you and I are important in God's plan.
May God Bless as you find and fulfil your calling.