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## Sermon

### ***A New Beginning vs a Bad Ending***

**Mark 1:14-20, Jonah 3:1-5,10**

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### ***Repent & Believe***

Our Gospel reading today comes from the beginning of the Mark's gospel. Jesus has been announced by John the Baptist, and now has started his public ministry. The core message of his preaching, is given in v15:

*"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

### **Kairos**

There are 2 words in the Greek language for time. Chronos which is time passing as we measure on our clocks and chronometers. Kairos which is a special time, a significant time. The word here is Kairos. Jesus was saying we have reached a significant moment in history. He is saying that at last all is ready for him to start his work which will establish the pivot point of history itself. What do they need to know?

### **Kingdom of God is near**

The Kingdom of God is near. The Kingdom of God is wherever God rules. It has been described by George Ladd as "a dynamic event in which God intervenes powerfully in human affairs to achieve his unfading purpose."

We need to understand that Jesus himself is the King of this Kingdom. And it is a kingdom at war with the kingdom of darkness. That means we can be members of his Kingdom or the other but not both. We can follow him or his enemy but there can be no divided loyalties.

Then comes the command:

### **REPENT!**

When you hear the word repent, you probably think of saying sorry for minor things you didn't take seriously anyway or better turning away from some sin.

There is of course the sense of turning from wrong doing, but the word is so much more than that. The Greek word is *metanoeo* which means literally to change your mind. It is a U-turn. If I am driving to Auckland and decide to go to Shakespear Park instead, we have to turn the car around and go back for the decision to be meaningful.

The reading from Jonah is an example of a whole city changing heart. Ninevah was the capital of the Assyrian empire. It was notorious for its bloodthirsty cruelty. To call them to change was an act of great courage. Extraordinarily, by God's grace, there was a profound response from the people such that God's threatened judgement of the nation was averted. They had a change of heart, they humbled themselves before God and asked for mercy.

## **BELIEVE!**

Jesus was saying make a radical change in your thinking and actions. And then he commanded them and us to believe the good news. Again we have trouble with this word, believe. Too often we think it is give mental assent to. It is far more than that. It is to trust. Our English word believe, comes from the Old English, *by this I live*. This is the foundation of my life.

Do you remember the Indiana Jones films. I think it was in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* that has Indiana cross a deep chasm. There is no apparent way across but he has instructions to cross at that point. He scatters sand in front of him and it shows that there is an invisible bridge. As he steps out the invisible rock bridge supports him as he crosses. That is an illustration of trusting belief!

Jesus is right that it is a choice to put our trust in someone or something. You can gather information, you can decide it is safe, but it is no use to you until you decide to trust.

Some of you made the decision to trust Jesus long ago, but we all have areas of our lives which still need to come into obedience to the King. If Jesus Christ is truly God and he is your Lord then what he says is more true than any thoughts or beliefs we may have which contradict him. Too often we rationalise away statements or teachings which we find hard or we don't see working. But I think the key to that situation is in his first words – Repent and Believe! We need to change our minds and believe what he says. If we disagree with Jesus, we need to change our minds and believe what he says.

As we seek God's rule in all aspects of our individual lives and our corporate life together, there will be adjustments and changes that God requires of us. Let's learn to be glad that we can change our minds and trust him more.

## **The Euthanasia Debate**

We need to talk about the Euthanasia debate. Last year, we had Professor David Richmond to address us on the subject. He has been a specialist in Gerontology – the care of the elderly – and in palliative care. He was quite clear about his thorough opposition to the concept.

In morals and ethics, there are always differing opinions. We have all seen those ethics debates where someone is questioned about what they would do in a situation and they give an answer. Then the interviewer adds some information and says, "Now what would you do?" The subject squirms and either sticks to his principles or caves in as the enormity of the situation mounts against him.

Vestry has considered this question and asked me to speak to the parish about it. They were clear that it is right that I should oppose the euthanasia bill.

I acknowledge some of you will feel or believe differently from me and the advice of Vestry. The most obvious reason is when people have seen a loved one in pain or indignity and just want it to be over. Sometimes that is more about the comfort of the relative than the patient. Nonetheless, bear with me and act as you will after you have viewed the

The first and obvious basis to oppose it for us as Christians is the Sixth Commandment, "You shall not murder." If we have any doubt that applies in the New Testament, we should note it is reinforced by Jesus in his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount – indeed he extends it to anger rather than lessens it. So too, he says,

Matthew 15:19-20 ... out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. <sup>20</sup> These are what make a man 'unclean' ...

Paul writes:

Romans 13:9 <sup>9</sup> The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself."

1 Timothy 1:8-10 <sup>8</sup> We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. <sup>9</sup> We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, <sup>10</sup> ... and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.

John wrote,

1 John 3:15 <sup>15</sup> Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

Revelation 21:8 <sup>8</sup> But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practise magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death."

For us who believe, that may be sufficient, but there are practical concerns about the bill too. The handout you were given gives some good background reading and offers some strong cautions about the proposal.

Let me highlight a few:

- There is an alarmingly vague set of criteria in the bill. It depends on diagnostic probabilities which are extremely difficult for doctors to provide –statistics are offered in the leaflet.
- Some conditions depend on patients' opinions – which is especially dangerous with depression – yet depression is likely in the face of any serious illness. However, depression is not normally permanent when it is part of the grief process and can be expected to pass.
- I believe this is a dangerous area especially for most of us and the older generation and in time for the rest when they too reach that stage in life. This provision would allow for elder abuse of suggestion that it would be better to die and not cause trouble and waste money whether the state's or the inheritance expected by a relative.
- If someone expresses the wish to die, the proposed law would compel their doctor to refer them to a doctor who has registered as being willing to perform euthanasia. Now the majority of doctors have said they oppose the practice. So any who register as being in support are already biased in favour of killing on request. These are the group who are to make the assessment as to whether the patient qualifies or not!
- Another weakness: Various declarations and forms would have to be filled in and signed to apply for the procedure. What if an unscrupulous child is watching the parent's estate being eaten away by rest home bills and wanted to finish off a parent to get quick access to the inheritance. How hard would it be to falsify papers? And what is the prescribed maximum penalty for interfering with these papers in the bill? A mere \$10,000! It should be the same as for murder if there is an attempt to kill someone off for gain.
- Then there is the message it sends to those contemplating suicide: It is alright to commit suicide when you feel the future is unbearable because of terminal illness, terrible pain and even severe depression but it is not OK to commit suicide if you are a depressed adolescent. We already have an appalling rate of youth suicide, there should be no messages around to validate suicide or cause people to lean towards it.
- I find it particularly frightening to look at overseas experience. In the countries where euthanasia has been allowed, it has spread and broadened.
  - It has spread from being limited to adults to allowing children to opt for it.
  - In Flanders, 30% of all euthanasia deaths were non-voluntary!

- In the Netherlands, psychiatric cases are being killed – 60 in 2016.
  - They are now considering allowing healthy people over 75 to be euthanized!
- Once you start on this, it is pushed and pushed to extremes.

Be assured, I am not talking about this for the sake of it or to distress anyone. I want to encourage you to write a submission to the select committee. The handout gives you some information and instructions for how to do it. Submissions close on 20<sup>th</sup> February.

You can of course, write a submission in favour of the bill if you wish – that is up to you.

If you have already written to the previous select committee, don't assume that submission will be taken into account this time around – it won't. You need to write to this particular Select Committee.

Another action is to write to our MP, Mark Mitchell. I rang his office to ask about that. His Electorate Agent told me the best time to do that is when the bill comes back for the second reading. He has said he will vote according to the mailbag coming to him. So you can make a difference there with your opinion. That can be an email, a letter or we can have a joint letter signed by members of the parish which we send in to him at that time.

I believe it is important that we try to stop this bill. Many lives will be lost in the future if it goes through – and some of those would better have been lived despite the feared conditions.

To come back to our gospel reading. In this matter, in all our opinions let us repent and believe. Change our minds to align with Jesus' thinking and trust that.