

“What Is the Gospel?”—Mark 1:14-15

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “What Is the Gospel?”, is Mark 1:14-15 → *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

I was one of many Christians who had the privilege of growing up with parents who made it evident in their life that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was of highest priority in faith, words and actions daily. I can remember learning “the Gospel in a nutshell” from John 3:16 → *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* (KJV) From the time I was knee-high to a grasshopper I can remember singing, “Jesus loves me! This I know, For the Bible tells me so . . . Yes, Jesus loves me!” As a child I quickly learned that the Gospel was bound up in love—specifically God and Jesus’ love.

However, this love was not so easy to accept. It is possible for a person to be loved and yet not feel loved. It is also possible for a person to be loved and struggle to display love. Even though I was taught as a

little child that Jesus loved me I found it very difficult to love myself and, for that matter, everyone else around me. There was a darkness inside of me that shrouded my thoughts and actions, even denying the work of Jesus for me. Besides, I really didn't love those kids who bullied me, constantly picked on me and beat me up. My socially unacceptable behaviors were explained as a low self esteem fueled by the bad behaviors of those around me. No matter how much my parents said they loved me . . . no matter how much people told how I was so gifted or talented or whatever in an effort to build me up . . . no matter how many times I heard that Jesus loved me . . . I did not live loved until ...

Verse 14 of our text says that following John the Baptizer's arrest by Herod (cf. Matthew 14:3-12), *Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God*. When thinking about *the gospel of God*, many may immediately think of the first four books of the New Testament (i.e. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) which record the life, work and teachings of Jesus. This is natural since they are called gospels. (cf. Mark 1:1)

The word "gospel" comes from a Greek word which means "good message." If you transliterate the Greek word into English letters it spells e-v-a-n-g-e-l-i- (add your own ending). For instance, the word "evangelist" typically refers to a person who engages in "evangelism" by sharing the good message with others. In light of the four Gospels of the

New Testament the evangelist shares the good news specifically about Jesus, the Christ. You may have heard the word “evangelical.” It is a part of the official name of our congregation—Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church. It is used to describe something as “gospel-centered”—specifically centered on the Person & Work of Jesus Christ.

According to verse 15 of our text, *the gospel of God* which Jesus proclaimed was: *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.* This proclamation is filled with good news! Jesus was announcing that God was fulfilling His promises given to people for centuries, as recorded in the Old Testament! He was announcing that God’s kingdom was present—a wonderful message in light of living under the messed up kingdoms of men in this world!

But this *good news of great joy . . . for all the people* announced by the angel to the shepherds was specifically about **a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord.** (cf. Luke 2:10-11) A Savior? A Savior from what? Release from the tyranny of the messed up kings and rulers of this world? Relief from so much human suffering? A transformation amongst people so that they are kind and loving toward one another instead of being so cruel and mean?

The gospel is not just about love. Rather, it is about a love **which deals with your sin once and for all.** The gospel can only be found in the midst of confession of sin. This is a huge challenge living in a culture

where sin is considered a “dirty word.” Call it unacceptable social behavior, a disorder, acting out or anything else but sin. Why? Because calling it sin means that one must accept the responsibility for his choices no matter what influences may have affected those choices. This sin is so seriously embedded in people that they will actually fight its removal! (cf. Romans 3:9-18)

Thus, Jesus commands you to *repent and believe in the gospel*. Repentance is the point of surrendering your tight clinch on sin by admitting your responsibility for your sin, proclaiming your sorrow over your sin in the sight of God and trusting only in the Person & Work of Jesus for forgiveness. The gospel is about a love for unlovable sinners like you and I, lost in the darkness of sin and headed directly for hell. We **need** a Savior.

The good news of Jesus Who loves you is described in Roman 5:6 → *While we were still weak*, (that is, powerless in our sin) *at the right time Christ died for the ungodly*. People may give up their lives for others based upon relationship to them or a perceived worthiness or value of them or a sense of community, family, duty and so forth. God’s love is so much deeper, described in Romans 5:8 → ***But*** *God shows His love for us in that **while we were still sinners**, Christ died for us*. It is a love for the unlovable expressed in Jesus dying the death we deserve because of our sin. It is pure grace.

This is much different than the world's concept of love as "tolerance." There are many Christians in our culture who define the gospel as loving others **in** their sin. Jesus came to love people **out of** their sin by becoming sin for them! (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21) Thus, 2 Corinthians 5:17 says: *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* The forgiveness which accompanies Christ's command to *repent and believe in the gospel* is not some kind of "half-way," partial forgiveness. It is the pronouncement of absolution—the complete and total blotting out of your sins before Yahweh in heaven! Yahweh put it this way in Isaiah 43:25 → *I, I am He Who blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins.* Absolution speaks the forgiveness of your sins in Jesus to your ears as the Holy Spirit seals that forgiveness in your heart!

This *gospel of God* gives you a whole new identity. 1 John 3:1 says: *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.* No longer are we defined by our sin as a label we need to carry all through life. This is in opposition to the world who wants people's lives to be reformed so their identity includes a label of sin.

For instance, after Jesus drove seven demons out of Mary Magdalene (cf. Mark 16:9) can you picture her describe her new identity as "Mary Magdalene, recovered demon-possessed" or "Mary Magdalene,

recovered prostitute?” What about Mary Magdalene, child of God, servant of Jesus and a new creation in His love? Can you picture Peter describe himself as “Peter, recovered denier?” What about Peter, child of God, servant of Jesus and a new creation in His love? In repentance of sin and faith in Jesus you have been given a new name with a new life, not a new name with an old label of sin!

And so, the rest of the story . . . Well, as you can see God’s Spirit brought me to *repent and believe in the gospel* by bringing me face to face with the darkness of **my own sinful heart** instead of blaming everyone else’s sin. In it all, Jesus brought me back to Himself through confession and absolution as He does constantly to this day. What is the gospel? It is the good news of the forgiveness of your sin in the Person & Work of a Savior, *Who is Christ the Lord*. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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