

# “Rythmns of Faithfulness”

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## I Peter 3:18-22

*For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.*

## Mark 1:9-15

*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'*

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God. Open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations and our faith to you and to the power of your holy spirit. Take all that we have within, take the words that we offer in song and in prayer, the words that we have read from scripture and the words that you laid upon my heart this morning to share. Touch, bless and transform all of these into the living word of Jesus Christ and let that word do it's work within us, among us and through us out into a hurting and broken world. Let that word guide us and teach us, let it encourage us and provide us a solid base for doing good so that we might love our neighbors as love you as faithful followers. We pray all this in Christ name. Amen. Repent and believe in the good news. Nothing gets my hackles up more than that phrase and scripture. With that single phrase, any comedian on late night television can mock Christianity. Repent and believe in the good news. Images of sawdust trails and country preachers standing in the sweltering sun under a tent, their short sleeves shirts soaking wet, their tie loosened, the spit flying, the face red, repent and believe in the good news. And yet Jesus Christ our Lord says this to those first people in Galilee. The first words in his ministry according to the gospel of Mark is that the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news. What is Jesus inviting us and them to trust and believe in? What is Jesus proclaiming? As I think about watching Jesus wonder around in Galilee bumping into different groups of people, saying to them that the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news. What I hear Jesus saying over and over and over again is, "Wake up, wake up to this new reality that God is doing in me. Wake up that the time that you've been waiting for of old is fulfilled in me, wake up and trust what I'm saying to you for God is near right there with us. Trust this, wake up to this, believe this, hope this. There is not a lot here in the gospel of Mark, it's a very concise story about what Jesus is up to. We get the baptism, the affirmation of the beloved son, the temptation in the wilderness is one sentence and then this Jesus beginning his ministry. Wake up and believe in the good news. As I was sitting with this today or not today but this week and thinking about what it is Jesus is inviting us to consider. For some reason by the power of this spirit I found myself unpacking this one sentence that Jesus utters.

In some commentary that I read on Deuteronomy 8, I noted that one of the footnotes said something about God was leading the people. There were two citations so I thought, "Well, I'll just look it up." And as we begin this season of lent and if you don't hear anything else that I say today, I would really encourage you to go and slowly read Deuteronomy 8, because in it we see all the threads that are appearing in the gospel of Mark, all the threads that are being woven together into Jesus Christ, all the color and the richness and the texture is coming from Deuteronomy 8. The passage goes, "This entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe so that you may live and increase and go in and occupy the land that the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these 40 years in the wilderness in order to humble you and test you to know what is in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. He humbled you by letting you hunger then by feeding you with mana with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. The clothes on your back did not wear out, your feet did not swell these 40 years, know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the Lord your God disciplines you. Therefore keep the commandments of the Lord your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him for the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land. A land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills. A land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates. A land of Olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you. Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God by failing to keep his commands, his ordinances and his statutes which I'm commanding you today. When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them and when your herds and flocks have multiplied and your silver and gold has multiplied and all that you have is multiplied do not exalt yourself. Forgetting the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery who led you through the great and terrible wilderness. An eerie wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. God made water flow for you from foot rock and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know to humble you and to test you and in the end to do you good. For some time I've been sort of fixated on this idea that in Jesus we have a new Moses figure, that the old testament stories of how powerful Moses was in delivering the people out of bondage in Egypt and through the water and into the wilderness and leading them right to the threshold of the Promised Land is in a sense what Jesus continues to do for us now, releasing us from bondage, being with us as we struggle through life, being with us in the wilderness or the wildness of our life, and then leading us right up until that moment, to that threshold, where we step from this life to the next into the promises that God has for us and for all people.

Over and over and over again in Deuteronomy, it says, "Do not forget that God is with you and that God is making these things happen with you in order to humble you and to test you and to discipline you but so that you might be blessed." And I don't know about you, but I realized this week how easy it is to forget that God is leading us. I think about grandparents making arrangements to fly into Miami so that they can attend the funeral of their grandchild, 1 of 17 funerals that will be happening this week. I think how easy it would be for them to forget that God is leading them and God is present with them and that God is near them and that God's goodness is at work in them.

I think about our beloved Bill, director of Music Ministry, who midweek got some news about his father and felt that he needed to go north to be with his family and to take his dad to the Mayo Clinic because things were getting worse. I think about the times that I worry about loved ones in my family who are ill and sick and whether I'm with them or not, it is so easy to forget that God is right there with us leading us through all the wild places in our lives. And I realize, too, that not only is it the difficult things in life that invite us to forget that God is near, but it's also the glorious things in life. I remember once talking to someone who had just gotten back from vacation, a young man whose life was going really well. He had just gotten a new job, a promotion, was making more money. They had a great vacation. Their kids were doing fantastic. And I asked him, "So how are you doing? I meant to be asking, "How is your soul in the midst of it all?" But the answer I got back is, "Me? I'm doing great." And being the pastor that I am and knowing that I am is the name that God gives God's self, I thought, "How ironic that he says 'I am doing great,' referencing his own being, not being aware of God." So whether we struggle or whether we have great celebrations and joys, it is easy for all of us to forget that God is near to us, walking beside us, encouraging us, whether we're sick or, as it says in Deuteronomy, our houses are fine and our flocks are multiplying and our silver and gold is multiplying and our 401(k) is multiplying and everything is multiplying, "Oh, it's all wonderful," do not exalt yourself forgetting the Lord, your God. So maybe what Jesus is saying when he says, "Repent and believe in the good news, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near," is simply that do not forget God. In the good times or in the bad, do not forget God.

I feel that I've lived now just long enough to realize that even in the absolute worse situations, if you sit with them long enough and breathe deep and open your heart, at some point, you can find God's presence even there. Sometimes it takes a long time and it seems like forever, but if we truly trust that God's time is fulfilled in Christ, if we trust that that kingdom is near to us, if we change how we view the world and believe in that goodness, we will see it at work in this world and at work in the lives of those we love and care about. And I'm always thankful, always thankful that the most real way God is near to us is because we are together as brothers and sisters in Christ. You may not see it in your own actions, your own words, your own care for someone, but you might be that loving presence of God for another. So as you see your friends and loved ones going through hard times or in celebrations, be kind and gentle to them, draw near to them, and be God's good news for them. Amen.