

"Come Along and See!"

Fourth in a Series on the Christmas Gospel
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Mark 1:14b-20 (also Luke 1:57-80)

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Response Required

The tornados last week around Kentucky, their destruction and death moved us.¹ But we didn't have to do anything. Our lives went on. But . . . what if the winds started raging here, and the dark funnel was coming our way? That information would demand our response! We'd head for cover.

We often learn things that are interesting. We might feel something. But then there is information that we have to do something about.

Here's something happier. Elizabeth and Zechariah! Their bundle of joy arrived, along with their pension cheques. That's information! When you've heard someone is expecting, it's good news! It's a whole different level, though, when your pregnancy test turns positive. That's news changes everything. You have to respond!

What about the Good News of Jesus? Interesting information? Good to fill 20 minutes on a Sunday morning? Or, does it require your response?

Messiah's Kingdom

This Advent, we're hearing Jesus' Good News. He is bringing God's Kingdom.

We're not used to kingdoms these days. Still, their basic principles are in our system too. A kingdom or country has territory. A sovereign rules over it. Canada has a symbolic sovereign, the Queen. Real sovereignty, however, rests with its people, who together choose a government to act on their behalf. The sovereign (or government) defends the kingdom from threats. Within the realm, things are done the sovereign's way (for us, through our laws and, especially, our Constitution and its Charter).

With God's Kingdom, Jesus is the Messiah (which means "king"). He is the Sovereign through whom God is bringing all things under God's rule. Though he is very un-royal-like. He is the messiah who is meek, the sovereign who kneels and serves.

Messiah Jesus's territory embraces everything: the whole earth, the entire cosmos, and every one of us critters down to our cells. Though his sovereignty so often works in small ways, often unnoticed.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tornado_outbreak_of_December_10%E2%80%932021

Messiah Jesus defeats our enemies: sin, death, evil. Though his weapon is himself, the offering of his life, death, and resurrection. His power is the way of the cross.

Messiah's kingdom is ruled by the law of love: love for God, love for each other, love for neighbour, love for enemy.

One more thing. Every kingdom has people, citizens. Who are Messiah Jesus' citizens?

First Citizens

Let's hear from Mark's Gospel. It's probably the first account of Jesus' Good News written down. After Mark says what Jesus is up to — announcing God's Kingdom — he tells about its first citizenship ceremony.

Jesus came into Galilee announcing God's good news, saying, "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Repent and believe this good news!"

As Jesus passed alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," he said, "and I'll show you how to fish for people." Right away, they left their nets and followed him.

After going a little farther, he saw James and John, Zebedee's sons, in their boat repairing the fishing nets. At that very moment he called them. They followed him, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired hands.²

Repent & Believe

Jesus has said that we belong to his Kingdom (we become citizens) by "repenting" and "believing." But these first four—Simon, Andrew, James, John— do not seem to do that.³

Not if "repenting" is feeling bad about terrible things you've done.⁴ They don't do that.⁵ Not if "believing" is about thinking certain things are true, or agreeing to a creed or something like that. They don't do that either. Their actions don't reflect our common

² Mark 1:14b-20, adapted from the Common English Bible.

³ John P. Bowen, The Unfolding Gospel: How the Good News makes sense of Discipleship, Church, Mission, and Everything Else (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 2021), 32.

⁴ The Oxford English Dictionary defines repent as "to feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrongdoing or sin." Quoted in Bowen, 32.

⁵ Simon Peter might be an exception. In Luke's account of this episode, Simon says to Jesus, "Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinner!" (Luke 5:8). I'm not sure that represents "repenting and believing," nor that this is necessarily the same event. Whatever the case, though, we see no similar move from the others.

notions of “repentance” and “belief.” Because our notions miss what Jesus is getting at.

Repenting here is more like changing how you think about things. You thought one way, but now you think another. In this case, Jesus changes their thinking about what life is for.⁶

Believing here is about trust. Who or what do you put your trust in?⁷

Repenting and believing fit together. Repenting is turning from something, and believing is turning toward the new thing or person you trust.

You and me, what is Jesus calling on us to turn from, and turn to?

Follow

Repent, believe . . . and then Jesus says, *“Follow me.” Turn around, trust me, and come along and see.*

When you trust someone—when you believe in them—you are glad to follow them. You might not know where you will be going together. Still, you count on them to lead you in a good way.

When you follow Jesus, you are his disciple.⁸

Disciple means “learner.” We could say you become Jesus’ student. But that feels like sitting in rows, with a teacher at the front, taking notes, and, trying to stay awake. Jesus sometimes teaches like that, like his “Sermon on the Mount.” I doubt anyone fell asleep, though.

More often, being Jesus’ disciple-learner is like being his apprentice. An apprentice spends time with her teacher, who has already mastered the craft. The apprentice watches and learns. She helps the teacher. As she gets better, she starts doing the work herself, with the teacher’s help. Eventually, the apprentice is doing the work herself, and the teacher watches, still ready to help if needed.

We learn by living life with Jesus.

It’s group learning. He calls people together, and forms communities of disciples. It started with Simon and Andrew, then James and John, then others. The community grew as he called more and more. It had its ups, and many downs. After his

⁶ Bowen, 32.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ For this and what follows, see Bowen 35-38.

resurrection and ascension, Jesus has continued to bring more and more into his learning community.

We call this “church.” There is more to Jesus’ church than this, of course. Still, it certainly is this: a community of people, who are hearing Jesus’ call to turn and trust, then come and see what he is doing, so we can learn together with him and each other, and share in his work. That’s church.

Jesus called those fishers and said *“I’ll show you how to fish for people.”* Unlike fish, though, being caught by Jesus is a good thing! So we invite others to share with us in this school, learning the work of Jesus.

What’s his work that we’re learning? The Kingdom! We’re learning to live as citizens in God’s Kingdom. We learn to live Jesus’ way. We learn to live the law of love, for God, each other, neighbour, enemy. We learn to see what Jesus is up to, and join him in those small, Kingdom-sized things. We learn the way of his cross. We learn all this by doing them with Jesus.

A Life Like His

That’s a lot to do.

“But wait,” Greg! You want to say, *“When you started this Advent exploration of Jesus’ Gospel, you said the Gospel is not another thing to do!”*⁹

You’re right. It isn’t. Jesus is bringing God’s Kingdom. You’ve got nothing to do, to make it come. He’s already doing it, everything that’s needed.

You don’t have to do anything to earn entry. There is no citizenship exam or questions at the border. Just hear his call, and know you are already in. Turn to him. See what he is up to and how he is doing it. Come along, and live a life like his.

But how can we? He is Jesus! I’m not. You’re not.

How about this? Steven Sondheim recently passed away. He wrote the lyrics for *West Side Story*, and composed musicals like *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Sweeney Todd*, and *Into the Woods*.¹⁰

Ask me to write a musical like Sondheim. No way! He could do that. I can’t. I can watch Jesus, but live a life like his? He can. I can’t.

⁹ elorauc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2021-11-27-Not-Another-Thing-to-Do.pdf
¹⁰ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Sondheim

But what if the genius of Sondheim could some come and live in me? Then I could compose musicals like him! What if the spirit of Jesus comes and lives in me? Then I can live a life like his! I can his apprentice, and grow in his Kingdom.¹¹

Guess what! Jesus fills us with his Spirit!

So this is the Great News! Jesus is bringing God's Kingdom. He's inviting you to come along and see. Turn and trust. He's going to be with you, his Spirit in you, all the way.

¹¹ John Bowen uses this example, which comes from William Temple. He used Shakespeare as his example; I changed it to Sondheim. See Bowen, 68.