

Mark 1: 9-15 Sermon for 8am

Mark, who wrote Mark's Gospel, is a man in a hurry!

He rattles through the gospel at breakneck speed only glancing at events as they speed by in the rearview mirror. You don't get it in the English translations, but even his Greek writing is breathless – it's all written in the present tense so you get an idea of the immediacy and urgency of what is going on. He's a man in a hurry.

So this morning's reading is a small sandwich of really important things, but which flash by as we hurtle headlong towards Mark's main event: Easter. And as we find ourselves in Lent, trying to catch our breath as life speeds by, Mark's urgency pushes us on to considering Easter too.

However, Mark doesn't just cut to the end. He may go apace, but he does spot the landmarks as they blur past. But you can be sure that there's therefore no waffle. He cuts to the chase. He tells us what is important and then moves on. I've spent a fair amount of my life in and around Cambridge, and it's a bit like the difference between a punting tour guide leisurely pole-ing his clients along while chatting them through all the various stories about the colleges on the backs as they pass, and Mark's tour, which is in a speedboat, with him shouting the names of the key landmarks as all the clients strain to hear over the splash whilst holding on to their hats!

So what we get is what is important. And what we get is three-fold. There's Jesus, identified as God's beloved Son, and importantly, that God is pleased with him. The heavens were torn apart and God's spirit rested upon Jesus. All that theatre, so those around Jesus could be sure, and perhaps even so Jesus himself could be sure, that Jesus is the Son of God. And no wayward rebellious Son at that, but instead, the one coming to do God's work in the way God wants. So Mark really quickly introduces Jesus, who he is and gives him the stamp of divine authority.

Secondly, we see the rush to the wilderness in a violent wrenching from the heights of divine affirmation to the lows of temptation and desolation. How often this is our experience too! Forty days of fasting. Forty days of temptation by the king of accusers. Forty days of trial. And forty days of waiting. This episode is the basis of our Lenten disciplines, and yet for Mark, it's only a sentence long, whereas if you've given up chocolate or alcohol or something else, perhaps it's already feeling like an eternity! Here we have a picture of Jesus' humanity, but also his faithfulness to his Father in heaven even when the divine affirmation must have become a distant memory, and fears and fatigue began to creep in. Jesus' Lent was a long wait and a long test, as a member of the human race, before his ministry began.

Then finally Jesus emerges into Galilee and Mark summarises the whole of his Gospel and the whole of Jesus' ministry in one sentence: It's time! The Kingdom of God is near. Change your ways, change your mind, change your whole life and believe. It's Great News!

And here's where we end up. We're at the beginning of Lent, but we look forward to an Easter time where we see birthed again the most spectacular news of all history: that God himself, has come to us, bringing with him the advent of a heavenly Kingdom where all things are new, where reality is filled with so much more potential, and where we can look to Jesus for rescue from the mire-y depths of our lives. We look to Jesus, for forgiveness, for life with God himself and for our place within the everlasting Kingdom of heaven.

It is in Jesus' coming that the time is right for us to recommit ourselves to this repentance, this turning over the whole of our lives to God, and recommit to being Jesus' followers in every step we take. Will each of us do that this Lent?

Amen.