

Grace, mercy, and peace by yours in the name of Jesus Christ. The title for today’s sermon is “A sense of urgency” and is based on the Gospel reading, Mark chapter 1. Let us pray...Amen.

In North America and Europe it seems the church has lost some of its sense of urgency to share and proclaim God’s Word of Gospel to the people around us. I can understand how this happens with people we don’t like, but what about with those closest to us. Still, God calls us to share the Gospel with all people, regardless of how we feel towards them.

In today’s OT reading we heard God’s words to Jonah, the 2nd time, urgently sending him to Nineveh, the mortal enemy of Israel, to proclaim God’s wrath was going to come down on them in just 40 days because of their sinfulness.

The first time God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, Jonah rejected God’s call and fled in a different direction. But no one can get away from God, so a long story short, Jonah was thrown into the sea for his unfaithfulness to God’s Word. That is where the account should have finished, but God delivered Jonah from death by having him eaten by a large fish, as mentioned in the Children’s message. God’s grace led Jonah to “**Repent and believe in the gospel.**” Once Jonah was thrown up on the beach, and then he went to Nineveh. There was a sense of urgency since Nineveh was about to be annihilated by God’s wrath regarding their sins. Yet God’s love and caring go beyond our human understanding as seen with how God treated by Jonah and the people of Nineveh.

This sense of urgency was also in today’s Gospel reading. Jesus’ first recorded words by Mark are: “**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.**”(Mark 1:15) After saying these words, Jesus proceeded to call His first disciples, Andrew, Peter, James, and John. They were fishermen fishing for fish, but Jesus called them to be fishers of men. And despite the stable pay cheque, pension, and good benefits plan they had with Mosaic,...or fishing, they left everything and followed Jesus. Mark records that they immediately left everything, no negotiations for wages, no bargaining for working conditions, they simply left it all and followed Jesus. There was a sense of urgency: “**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God was at hand**” in their very presence. Salvation had come to Israel. The time was now to get going!

But the sense of urgency didn’t stop with Jonah’s proclamation to the city of Nineveh, nor did the sense of urgency end with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Instead the urgency increased! Jesus’ Words: “**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel**”(Mark 1:15) was actualized and finalized in Jesus death, resurrection, and ascension! The time is complete, for the Saviour—the Messiah—for He has come and accomplished everything necessary. As such, the kingdom of God is not just at hand, but will return at any moment. The saving Gospel of Christ is entrusted to His church here on earth, to you and to me, to proclaim to all whom God places in our lives. The Saviour of the

world has come, has taken your sins, mine, and every sin ever to be committed, and Jesus fully paid for them with His blood on the cross. Therefore, **“Repent and believe in the Gospel.”**

But how often do we really even think about these words: **“Repent and believe in the Gospel!”** Yet, Jesus doesn’t suggest this: He proclaims it, commands it, He orders it. This is the Gospel message: Christ crucified for you and your sins, and risen for your salvation. Paul told the Corinthians at the beginning of his first letter to them, He said: **“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”**(1 Corinthians 2:2) Nothing but our crucified and risen Saviour.

Why? Because the time really is short! Christ is coming again! Sometimes we like to think we have a lot of time left, but the reality is Jesus could return at any second, or we could die. When He does return, or in death, for us who are saved—who **“repent and believe in the gospel”**—it will be a glorious day and an awesome eternity. But for those of our friends, our family, our neighbours, and strangers who do not believe it will be hell, literally and for eternity. For in death, or at Jesus’ Second Coming, there is no second chance, no appeals, no mulligans: when Christ returns it is over and all who believe will be separated from those who have rejected. Those who have the gift of faith will be taken into the presence of God for eternity. Those who do not believe will actually be condemned by their unbelief and will spend eternity in the fires of hell for their rejection of Christ.

This is why Paul tells us in today’s Epistle reading: **“This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none,³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods,³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.”**(1 Corinthians 7:29-31) Paul is calling us to repentance. The time is short and too often we are way more concerned about our worldly possessions and things than we are concerned about Christ and His Gospel proclamation. We are more too concerned with what feels good in the here and now than we are for our family and friends eternal salvation.

When given the opportunity to cast God’s net out on those who do not know God, how often do we let the opportunity pass because we do not know the right words or are scared that we might say the wrong thing.

When I was working in the chemical plant before going to seminary, one of my roles was I was part of the fire rescue team. One day we were training off-site, specifically in the search for and rescue people from burning buildings. One of the questions asked was: “If we find someone inside the burning building who is in rough shape, or that might even die if we try to move them? What do we do then?” Now I have to clean up the language a little, but in short the instructor gave these words of wisdom: “They are already dead if you leave them in there. So

get them out! In your hands they have a chance to live. Yes, they might die in your hands as you try to save them, but at least they won't burn to death inside the building. They might tell you they are alright, and if they do you will have to leave them there, but they will, in doing nothing, they will burn to death. If you feel the need to be gentle because you are scared they might get a little hurt remember what will happen if you don't move them: they will burn to death! The only way they have a chance is if you do something!” In every rescue there was a huge sense of urgency as lives are at stake.

But in this life, we aren't the spiritual fire fighters: too often we're the ones who stacked up the wood, soaked them in gasoline, lit the fire, poured more gasoline on the flames, and then wondered what all went wrong when we realized we were trapped inside the burning building. We aren't the victim, we are the guilty party. **“Repent and believe in the Gospel”**

Yet this is exactly why our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ came into our world: to save sinners from the fires of hell! Jesus plunged into our burning hell to cover us with Himself, to pick us up, and to save us out of it. Jesus faced the flames of our sins and our trespasses, the fire of our rejection and our fighting against Him, and He walked through it all, and came for you and for me, even when we had no chance for escape. At just the right time, Jesus came into our condemned and broken world to save us from the flames and the fire and the horrid death we rightly deserve, by taking all the flames upon Himself. Jesus took the fire, the burning, and the death we rightly earned for our sinful actions and he died in your place and mine. Jesus came for one purpose: to save you and me—He saved us sinners—from the eternal fires of hell by dying for you, rising for you, and by covering you with His righteousness. Jesus descended to hell for you, but not to be further punished there, but to proclaim His victory in death for you. Jesus put out the fires you deserve in the waters of Holy Baptism.

For there is only one source of water large enough to put out, and to keep putting out, the fires of our sins: the waters of Holy Baptism and God's Word. We cannot earn or buy that water, but Christ freely pours it out on us each and every day from our baptism to our grave. We have the privilege to live each day in the soaking wet realities and promises of our baptism, because there we were joined with Christ in His perfect life, in His perfect and all-atoning death, and in His resurrection to life eternal. God continues to pour out Christ's gifts of deliverance and forgiveness from the font on us each and every day of our lives.

With Baptism, God also pours out the Living Water of His Word on us as we hear, sing, pray, speak, shout, and even cry His Word. For this Living Water gives Holy Baptism its power. This water brings us back to our Baptism and the gifts their showered out on us. In addition, Christ also feeds us the only medicine to repair the self inflicted burns we've given ourselves through our sins; Jesus own body and blood, broken and shed for you and eaten with your mouth, in the Lord's Supper. Here Christ brings the medicine of immortality to your lips and continues to forgive you and to heal your spiritual burns.

There is great urgency in this life for Christ is returning soon. Jesus death, resurrection, and ascension fulfilled every prophecy except for the ones around His return. There is nothing left to happen except for Christ to return. We are saved by the death and resurrection of Christ in our place. There is nothing left for us to do or say in order to save us: Jesus did it all! We do have the blessed opportunity to share the Good News of Christ and His waters of salvation with all who are around us. Is there a sense of urgency, absolutely. Will sharing the Gospel get us into heaven quicker, absolutely not. Instead, the Holy Spirit promises to work through the Gospel to bring Christ's salvation to the hearer and to accomplish exactly what God wants to accomplish (*Isaiah 55:11*), yet not always exactly as we may like. Still, we've been given the greatest gift and most powerful resource on earth: **“the Gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation to everyone who believes”**(*Romans 1:16*)

You and I, we are saved by grace through faith. We are also given this blessed and wonderful gift which we can share with all who are around us. Let us regain that send of urgency to share Christ with those around us. We say the wrong thing or even do the wrong thing, we might even seriously mess it up. But like a person trapped inside a burning building, they are dead if we do nothing. So try to get them out. **“Repent and believe in the Gospel”** and try again. **“For the present form of this world is passing away”**(*1 Corinthians 7:31*) For the same Christ who died for you, died for me, and He died for all people. This same Christ is coming back soon. Rejoice in Him and in His sense of urgency, for He came for you, and continues to come for you in order to save us and all people. In Christ we have life. Amen.

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