

Our Gospel reading comes from the beginning of Mark. First things first. We are told in quick succession what Jesus did. The other Gospels give us many details that Mark leaves out. The quick succession of events allows us to see in a snapshot, as it were, Jesus in action. He's baptized. He is driven out into the wilderness. He goes to Galilee to preach the Gospel of God.

The substance behind these events are communicated in the words that Jesus is said to have preached: "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel." The reason why Jesus was baptized was because the time had come for the Messiah, the Christ—both words meaning "King"—to begin his work. The king began his work in solitude, being tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Then he goes out in public. He says, "God is near. He, the king, is coming. Change your ways. Believe the good news."

Mark's description of Jesus's preaching in Galilee nicely sums up this snapshot of events, but this description has much broader applicability. It is a good summary of what was preached and believed during New Testament times. Jesus's disciples come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, or Christ. Jesus is God's great king, who was prophesied to come in the Old Testament. Jesus's disciples believed that he was going to set things right. Justice and righteousness were going to replace corruption and oppression. It's perfectly understandable, then, that people should repent. They should change their ways, get on board. The king is here, and that's good news.

Jesus's disciples, who heard and believed his preaching, who knew what the Old Testament said about the Christ, got on board with Jesus being the king. Things looked good too. Jesus was able to cast out demons, heal diseases, calm storms, feed many thousands. Jesus did things that nobody else in the Scriptures had done. Jesus taught things that were so different in tone and content to what their usual teachers taught them. The faithful believed that Jesus was who he said he was. He was the long-awaited king.

As you know, these people's faith was shaken to the core when God killed this beloved king on the cross. In fact, the disciples lost their faith in Jesus being the king. Stands to reason, does it not? How can someone who is dead bring about justice and righteousness? There would be no more signs and wonders because they put that man's body in a tomb. The movement, that at one time numbered in the thousands, dwindled to being next to nothing.

Jesus rose from the dead. The Gospel writers are pretty honest about how slow the disciples were to believe again. Thomas, for example, wasn't going to take the women's word for it. He wasn't even going to take the 10 apostles' word for it. He said with conviction, "Unless I put my fingers into the nail prints, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe!" But eventually the disciples were brought around.

Jesus hadn't been the king that they were expecting. They were expecting just another great king like King David had been a great king. Their sights were set too low. They only wanted a king who would make Israel great again. Jesus's kingship went far beyond that. This king didn't just defeat some bad politicians. Jesus defeated Satan and the other demons. Jesus defeated death. Jesus redeemed sinners so that there is peace between God and us.

This fuller understanding of Jesus as the king is what the disciples preached. This fuller understanding of Jesus as king has some surprising effects. The disciples no longer associated only with their fellow Jews. Jesus died and was raised for the godless Gentiles too. The disciples told the slaves that they weren't

worthless. They were God's own sons and daughters. They told the rich and the proud that their high quality of life would become meaningless when Jesus the king came. The disciples' message was the same as Mark describes Jesus's preaching in our Gospel reading today: "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the Gospel."

So is Jesus's preaching still applicable to us today? Can we say to our fellow human beings, "The time has come. God is coming. Repent and believe the Gospel?"