

**Transformation through Change** Third Sunday in Ordinary Time/B January 25, 2015  
9:00 AM Jon 3:1-5, 10; 1 Cor 7:29-31; **Mk 1:14-20** (Fear keeps evil in place; trust displaces it.)

**“This is the time of fulfillment; the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”**

This section of Mark’s Gospel describes what we could call **Jesus’ honeymoon**, the beginning of his ministry, a time of hope and goodwill all around, where the crowds gathered with great expectation, where his words were full of power and mighty deeds proceeded from his hands. **But then there was this message:** “Repent, and believe in the gospel. This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand.” One wonders if anybody, even his chosen ones mentioned in today’s gospel, **if anybody really listened to what he was saying**, or if they listened, **if they comprehended**. Later developments suggest no.

**Well, what was he trying to say? A little background** perhaps: **the Jewish people** looked forward to the coming of what the prophets called the kingdom of God, which meant for them the rule of justice, equity, peace, and goodness. Now they believed that this would happen when **God would intervene in history as they understood God had intervened in the past**, believing, if I dare say literally, the stories from the Old Testament, and that **he would wipe out the Romans and all other nations that in any way threatened them**.

From this point of view, Jesus’ message was good news and bad news. He was announcing the fulfillment of time and the imminent arrival of the kingdom, but also at the same time not the destruction of their enemies. No, Jesus’ idea was very different. He was saying, yes, **the kingdom is here, but you have to bring it into yourselves. God isn’t intervening to wipe out your enemies**. You have to be reconciled with your enemies. You have to learn how to **love your opponents and to do good to those who hate you**. Then you will see the world change all around you. **Then there will be a transformation of everything, but not until you change**. That’s the imperative here: “repent”; it means change, change the way you think, change the way you feel, change the way you act. So this isn’t what a lot of people were hoping for. The sick, the demonized, the downtrodden experienced fresh hope and new freedom, but many others especially the zealots, the fanatics, and many rank and file were sorely disappointed. This isn’t the God they were waiting for. This wasn’t a feel-good religion.

So how do people look at this today? How do we hear the message? **Are we aware of our need to change if we want change in the world?** Do we believe we have to become the change we want in the world? That is, after all, a way of putting Jesus’ message rather accurately. **Do we believe as Jesus said, as the angel Gabriel said, “With God are all possibilities”?** Do we really believe that? No one, even Christ himself, could do everything to change the world because of free will; but **everybody can make a contribution**. Jesus made a total contribution of his whole life. We all can make some contribution. No one is totally helpless. No one is totally powerless. But we have to **believe in the power of God to help us change, and that is the message of repentance**. God is making all things possible. He is now our great advocate, our Paraclete, our counselor, and will help us do this, but he is

not going to do it for us. That's what Jesus made clear: God is not going to do it for us. So we have to learn even how to hear the stories of the past in a different way, in the way Jesus looked at it. That means that **we have to face issues in our own lives: our fears, our anger, and our anxiety that keep us the way we are**, because if we don't change those things, then everything will stay the same. **This is a gospel of change beginning on the inside and then moving out into the world bringing transformation and new life.**

A good example of this is found in the person we celebrated last week, Martin Luther King. Although most of us here never experienced this, many black people, especially black males, lived in perpetual terror, because all of a sudden whites could go berserk and start beating them or even killing them and get away with it, literally, with impunity. **Martin Luther King told the blacks, especially black men, that the only way anything would ever change is for them to face their fears that imprisoned them.** They would have to deliberately put themselves in the situation where they would get beaten and arrested and put into jail. And they would find out that **that would free them.** That was what Freedom Riding was all about from their point of view: meeting their fears, submitting to the beatings that they were afraid of. The result was all predictable, but then what wasn't predictable was the singing that came from the Birmingham jail. That's what defeated the enemy, the joy that they experienced in their solidarity with one another. **Martin King learned from Jesus actually how to confront evil people with power, and he knew that it included being willing to suffer and even die if necessary.**

Now that sounds rather dire, but it's logical. The Letter to the Hebrews says that the human race is kept in bondage by the fear of death. Well, **the only way to get out of bondage through the fear of death is being willing to die.** That's what Jesus did. That's what Martin Luther King actually did. That's what the martyrs did. Even the saints who didn't die did that same thing. That is the way of Christ. And racism is only one form of evil. There are many forms of evil, but they all do the same thing. They keep people afraid. They keep people angry, and they keep people anxious. And about all this, Jesus said, "Fear is useless." Fear is useless in the face of evil. "What is needed is trust." **Fear keeps evil in place; trust displaces it.**

At this very moment the world needs this exact message, that is, our future can be great if we trust God and live by his rule, if **we give ourselves over to the standard that God has set for us in Christ.**