

Repent and Believe Third Sunday in Ordinary Time/B January 21, 2018 8:00 AM
Jon 3:1-5, 10; 1 Cor 7:29-31; **Mk 1:14-20** (How are we going to be from now on, merely passengers on the voyage through life, or members of the crew?)

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

You have all heard this so often it doesn't cause any distress, I'm sure; but in Jesus' day it did cause distress. In fact yesterday we read from the Gospel of Mark, in which is said that Jesus' relatives came to take him away because he was out of his mind. What put him out of his mind was this announcement; it sounds crazy. **If you were living then and there, this would sound crazy.** The kingdom of God was something Jewish people longed for and prayed for and waited for. But they were expecting some sort of triumphal, victorious arrival. And Jesus, an itinerant preacher in Galilee, announces the kingdom of God is indeed here at hand, now. And they say to themselves, the audience, **now? Here? That's not what we were expecting.**

And yet **Jesus' actions backed up his words.** When he spoke the blind could see, the lame could walk, lepers were cleansed, and he intended this to be the proof in the pudding, so to speak, just a foretaste of the power of God's kingdom **making all things new, restoring and renewing the world, and mostly the people in the world.** However he did demand something, and there was the rub. **He said, “Repent and believe.”** Well repent in Greek, the Greek word in the New Testament, really means **“to think in a new way,”** meaning you cannot think according to your experiences. Now we all do this. Our experiences are the base of what we think about life. And if someone proposes something totally contrary to everything we have ever seen or heard or done or experienced, we say, no, that's not possible. That's exactly what was happening here. Jesus was proposing something totally new, and people were saying that's not possible, that doesn't happen. But then is it normal to see ill people suddenly completely recovered? No, that's not normal either, and yet they saw that and they admitted they saw that. And everyone came to him because of it, but then they didn't want to listen to what he said. This was the very strange situation in Jesus' mission and ministry: **people wanted his touch, but they didn't want to listen to what he said.**

He said, “Repent.” meaning you have to think in a new way, you have to make room for newness. And then he said, **“And believe.”** Now “believe” can mean a lot of things, two things in

particular. Normally “believe” means to assent. And there are a lot of people in the whole history of Christianity who have assented to what the Bible says, to what the creed professes, to what the Church teaches—they assent to it, they believe. That’s not what is meant here. **What is meant here is a complete commitment of the will, not just the mind**, a complete commitment of the will. And the point is that if we really commit our wills to this belief in the kingdom of God, **then the miraculous opens up**. The healing of the sick was just an indication of what it could be. The story from Jonah, another example of a miraculous change in a whole people. Now that’s probably fiction. But the point is this is what we are aiming for, and this is what is actually possible because God is God, and this is the time of fulfillment.

Now the difference between many people’s faith, which is mental, and the commitment of the will, I will describe as going on a voyage. Now maybe some of you, maybe many of you, have been on a cruise. I would say that is vacation. So **you go on the cruise**, you pay your passage, **you trust that the captain and the crew are going to get you where you want to go**. When you get up in the morning you decide what you are going to do that day, maybe go sunning or swimming or maybe just nap all day. You don’t worry about where the ship is actually going; you leave that in someone else’s hands. **That is the first kind of faith; that’s believing, that’s trusting**. That’s not what Jesus is asking for here. **Here he wants more of a commitment**. And that’s why he then went to call the fishermen. He wants them to be the crew, not the passengers. **That’s his idea of Church; it’s the crew that helps him direct the voyage of life**. So this gospel then asks us to answer the question: how are we going to be from now on, merely passengers on the voyage through life, or members of the crew?