

An advertising slogan from the past proclaimed: “You never get a second chance to make a first impression,” and I suppose that is true. The first comes first. We put a lot of stock in first impressions. A business manager once told me, “I know about ten seconds into an interview if someone is right for our company.” I was amazed by that. So, in Mark chapter one, Jesus appears. This is his chance to make a first impression, and the first words out of his mouth are: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” What kind of impression do you think that made? What impression does it give you?

In this statement, Jesus summarizes everything he’s about. He’s consciously aligning himself with the message of the prophets (the most recent being John the Baptist) when He says, “Repent!” To repent is to turn away from something; to do a 180 degree turn, and if you do a 180 degree turn, you’re going towards something new, which in this case is believing in the gospel. Now most churchgoers know that the word ‘gospel’ means “good news.” It would be correct to say that it is ‘news that brings joy.’ This word packed a punch in the ancient world, but it was not usually a religious punch. It meant history-making news. One example: when Greece was invaded by Persia and the Greeks won the great battles of Marathon and Solnus, they sent heralds who proclaimed news that brought joy: “We have fought for you; we have won, and now you’re no longer slaves. You’re free!” A gospel is a re-telling of something that has happened in history; something that has a direct impact on your life.

This is one of the distinguishing marks of the Christian faith. Other religions and worldviews say, “Here is what you have to do to connect with God. Here is what you have to do to be thought of as a ‘good person.’” But the gospel of Jesus says, “Here is what has been done in history. This is what Jesus did to earn a way to God for you.” Like the heralds of Greece, this is the message: “Jesus has fought for you; He has won, and now, you’re no longer slaves to sin. You’re free.” As far as first impressions go, how would you rate this?

But let’s back up for a second. Before Jesus talks about repentance and joyful news, he says, “the kingdom of God is at hand.” Jesus spent a huge amount of His teaching ministry exploring the concept of the Kingdom of God, and here in Mark chapter one, right out of the gate, He says, ‘the Kingdom is here.’ How can He say that? Why does He say that?

In the first two chapters of Genesis, we see that human beings were created to live in a world in which all relationships were whole—were perfect—because God was King. All other relationships were right because that relationship was right. The third chapter of Genesis tells the next part: that we have each chosen to be our own King. We have gone the way of putting ourselves on the throne of our lives, and this sort of self-rule destroys us. There's nothing that makes you more miserable than self-absorption—a constant concern with how am I feeling; how am I doing; how are people treating me; am I proving myself; am I succeeding; am I failing? When we decide to be our own King, everything falls apart; socially, psychologically, spiritually. But we all long to be brought back in.

This longing is deeply embedded in us. It is deeply embedded in the legends of many cultures, and though the details change, the theme is the same: A true King will come back, slay the dragon, kiss us and wake us up, rescue us from the villain, lead us back to the dance. The true King will come back and put everything right. The joyful news of the Kingdom of God is this: Jesus is that true King.

You know when you're living under the kingship of Jesus, because everything is different with Him. He rules in the most unusual ways imaginable:

Instead of sending out armies to battle evil, He did it Himself. And won.

This King gives special honor to the poor, the lonely, the sick, the outcast, and make sure they are truly helped.

This King exercises leadership by serving: in fact, He leads by doing the thankless tasks; the jobs of a household servant are not below Him.

This King gives full access to His subjects, and instead of subjects, calls them family.

And this King, King Jesus, displays power not by exacting revenge, but by showing mercy, even though it cost Him dearly.

The Kingdom of God came into the world when Jesus came into the world. The Kingdom of God is still in the world. Where is it? It is wherever the joyful news of the King is proclaimed: "Repent and believe in the gospel." It is wherever people are different and unusual in the way that Jesus was different and unusual. The world has a critical need for us to be that difference. Our nation is starved for unusually grace-filled people. The time has come. The Kingdom of God is here. Let's take what's here out there.

