

HERE COMES JESUS
 (or, “If You Believe What Jesus Said,
 Do You Do What Jesus Said?”)
 Mark 1:14-20
 February 1, 2009 (Ordinary Days – 4)
 Oakland Avenue PCUSA-Rock Hill
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MARK 1:14-28 (NRSV)

- 14 *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,*
- 15 *and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”*
- 16 *As Jesus passed along the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea---for they were fishermen.*
- 17 *And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”*
- 18 *And immediately they left their nets and followed him.*
- 19 *As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets.*
- 20 *Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.*
- 21 *They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.*
- 22 *They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*
- 23 *Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit,*
- 24 *and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”*
- 25 *But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!”*
- 26 *And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.*
- 27 *They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching---with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.”*
- 28 *At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.*

She had been abused.....she was pregnant.....she had been deserted.....and she was alone. And her mood, as she walked out of the Winthrop dorm, suitcase in hand, facing the unknowns of 2009, was one of **FEAR**.

Or again: He had just moved into Westminster Towers, the first move he had made in 52 years without Sarah. Her death, his retirement, his move from Washington, his failing vision, his knowing almost no one by name, all increased a feeling that he could

not exactly put his finger on.....but what you and I would recognize immediately as **FEAR**.

Or, again: She kept sorting through the bills as if that would make them less; VISA.....Exxon.....Sears.....JC Penny's...Texaco.....Mastercard.....Sam's.....L.L. Bean.....Belk's..... And then there was the mortgage, the Eagle Club, the grocer, the pledge to church, the car payment, the druggist, the doctor, the boys' tuition. If only Harold kept the books and could see where the money went! Then, *perhaps*, there would not be as many fights and misunderstandings, and she would not feel so all alone in her **FEAR**.

Or, again: He had really messed up his life.....not only his life, but the lives of others as well. The transitions had been too easy: from beer...to bourbon...to pills...and then to the hard stuff. And the worry-lines and the puffy eyes belied his 19 years as he struggled to lift the television set through the window without waking the household. If he got caught, it would mean prison; but if he did not get the TV and sell it, it would mean no money and that would mean no stuff and that would mean HELL itself! Is it any wonder that that paralyzing feeling in the pit of his stomach was one of **FEAR**?

It is into the world of **FEAR**,

it is into the year 2009,

it is into Rock Hill, South Carolina,

that Jesus comes preaching the gospel: **The Good News of God**.

And for that, you and I ought to get down on our knees and thank God Almighty!

The gospel-writer Mark in today's passage gives us what is to be his theme for his entire book about Jesus; it is verses 14-15 (RSV):

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Now, of course, I do not know how you find yourself this morning as you come to worship: afraid.....confused....confident.....self-satisfied.....optimistic...bored.... uneasy.....ambivalent..... but however you find yourself this morning, Jesus strides into our lives through this Gospel of Mark preaching the Good News of God!

"HERE COMES JESUS"

(Chancel Choir)

Here comes Jesus, see Him walking on the water,
He'll lift you up, and He'll help you to stand;

Oh, here comes Jesus, He's the Master of the waves that roll,
Here comes Jesus, let Him take your hand.

(Chancel Choir)

Here comes Jesus, see Him feed the hungry people,
He'll fill your life till you hunger no more;
Oh, here comes Jesus, He's the answer to your every need.
Here comes Jesus, He will your life restore.

(Congregation and Chancel Choir)

Here comes Jesus, see Him cleanse the dirty leper,
He'll heal your heart and will give you His aid;
Oh, here comes Jesus, He's the great Physician;
Here come Jesus, Don't be afraid!

(Congregation and Chancel Choir)

Here come Jesus, see Him walking up to Calvary,
He's going to die for you and me;
Oh, here comes Jesus, He's the ransom for the guilty one;
Here comes Jesus, to set us free!

(A New Now, Chicago, Hope Publishing Company, 1971, #83)

The way Mark remembers it, **JESUS CAME PREACHING.** *One has to wonder about that.*

My wife Sally has a cousin who is a big-time farmer down in southwest Georgia, and when Jimmy Carter became President of the United States, that cousin was partially responsible. He was an organizer and a supporter and a politician; he was the one who organized what they called "**the Peanut Brigade.**" *One wonders why Jesus did not swoop into political office like Jimmy Carter or Barak Obama.*

The way Mark remembers it, **JESUS CAME PREACHING.** *One has to wonder about that.*

Robert K. Massie has written a book entitled Peter the Great which is a masterful story of 18th century Russia and the way that one man literally pulled a balking, backward nation into western civilization. Peter the great built a huge army and a huge navy, and with the force of arms and blood and power and killing, Peter the Great changed the course of the European and the Scandinavian world. *One wonders why Jesus did not march into power with a mighty host of angels.*

But the way Mark remembers it, **JESUS CAME PREACHING.** And the *content* that Mark remembers Jesus preaching is important, also. **JESUS CAME PREACHING**

THE GOSPEL OF GOD.....

THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD.

Tobacco Road is perhaps Erskine Caldwell's most famous book. But one of my favorites is entitled Deep South. The book Deep South is the story of Erskine Caldwell and his father, Ira Sylvester Caldwell, a home missionary for the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church during the early part of the 20th century. One of the interesting things that I learned from this little book is that Erskine Caldwell is named after "the" Erskine of ARP fame for whom both Erskine College and Erskine Theological Seminary are named.

In Deep South Caldwell introduces us to many of the preachers of various kinds with whom his father dealt. A typical "taste" can be found in the words of a Cumberland mountaineer concerning his preacher:

I've been might particular about keeping on the good side of preachers all my life and I'm going to keep on staying on that side, too. This here preacher who's preaching here now is a hard man about religion, I tell you, and he won't skip a chance to say you're going to lose your soul to the devil and end up in hell instead of heaven if you don't do all the time like he says. He ain't like some of them easy-going preachers I've heard preach in the past who act like they're scared to talk out real loud. This one keeps me scared half to death.

This preacher I've been talking about is a Sanctified preacher. I tell you, he's a hard man about religion and don't think he won't bear down on you. He can shout good and loud and I'm satisfied that the best kind. I've been going to some church or another all my life, but I've switched over to the true religion now and joined up with the Sanctifieds. I done that just because of him. I wouldn't go back to easy-going and soft-talking religion for nothing in the world now.

He's the same preacher who took my oldest boy to one side one Sunday after preaching and told him he wanted him to be a preacher. I don't know all of what he said to the boy, but some of it must've scared the daylights out of him, because one thing he said was he was going to quit praying for the boy's soul and he'd end up with the devil in hell instead of in heaven with Jesus if he didn't drop everything and start in preaching.

(Caldwell, Erskine, Deep South, Athens, Georgia, The University of Georgia Press, 1980, p. 32-33)

Mark does not remember Jesus preaching hell, fire and damnation. Mark does not remember Jesus preaching to scare the daylights out of people.

What Mark remembers is that JESUS CAME PREACHING

THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD.

And what is this “good news”?

The great Swiss theologian Karl Barth, in his book Deliverance to the Captives, says (New York, Harper & Bros., 1961, p.69):

“It is the good news of what God is, wants, and does... and is, wants, and does for us!”

The gospel-writer Mark remembers Jesus himself defining the good news in these words:

“The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (vs. 15)

Now, in a few minutes you and I are going to gather around the Holy Table to experience once again the grace of God. And as we gather, we will have the good news of Jesus ringing in our ears:

“The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (vs. 15)

So, sing with me:

Here comes Jesus, see Him cleanse the dirty leper,
He'll heal your heart and will give you His aid;
Oh, here comes Jesus, He's the great Physician;
Here come Jesus, Don't be afraid!

Here come Jesus, see Him walking up to Calvary,
He's going to die for you and me;
Oh, here comes Jesus, He's the ransom for the guilty one;
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