

God's grace and peace to you all from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today I want to touch on a few things that come from our reading from Mark's gospel. What I want to do is to look at that word, gospel or good news, and parse it out a bit. After that I want to spell out the implications that that gospel has for each and every one of us.

The gospel of Mark starts us off with this verse: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God." And with a verse like that we can ask ourselves, "What exactly is the good news, the gospel?" In Scripture, the word "gospel" carries with it two meanings. One meaning is the broad sense of the gospel. The other meaning is the narrow sense of the gospel. In some places in Scripture it means the broad sense, like in Matthew 26:13 where Jesus says "Truly I tell you, wherever this good news (gospel) is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her." And in other places in Scripture it means the narrow sense, like in Romans 1:16 where St. Paul says that "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."

First, what is the broad sense of the gospel? The broad sense of the gospel is the entire story of what God promised to do and did through Jesus Christ. It is the story of Jesus Christ from the womb to the tomb – it's about his birth, life, teachings, healings, miracles, sufferings, death, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. We can see Scripture use this sense of the word in many places, and we can see the gospel in a nutshell by reading the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed. The broad sense is about the whole story of God in Jesus Christ – womb to tomb.

Now, what is the narrow sense of the gospel? The narrow sense of the gospel is the specific pronouncement, it is the announcement of what God has done for you in the work and person of Jesus Christ; that he was crucified for your sins and that you are forgiven, that he defeated sin, death, and the devil for you on the cross and through his resurrection, that because he lives still you can be assured that even when you die, one day Christ will come visibly again to raise your dead body from the grave. Or more simply, we can say that the narrow sense of the gospel is about the one-sided rescue that God embarked on to bring you back to himself.

Or to use another example, let's look at World War II. When we think about WWII we often think about it in the narrow sense, that the War was won, democracy was back in Europe, and Western civilization reaped the benefits of the new technology and blossoming economies. However, WWII was about a lot of things; people, politics, propaganda, economy, battles being fought in France, Germany, Italy, Russia, etc. It was about people leaving home to serve their country, knowing that they may not come back home alive. It was about families celebrating sons coming home, and it was about families mourning the death of their kids. So the broad sense of WWII was all of that, whereas the narrow sense of WWII was that the Allies won and evil was defeated.

The reason why I wanted to spell out quickly what the broad and narrow senses of the gospel are is because in this first verse in Mark, the word gospel here means, well, both. The good news of Jesus Christ is the story that Mark is about to tell (the broad sense), how he came to forgive sinners, heal the sick and the lame, teach and preach, to be crucified, die, be buried, and to rise

again on the third day. But this word gospel for Mark also means that in Jesus Christ God is about to embark on the most one-sided rescue the world has ever seen, as Jesus says later in this gospel, “the son of Man came to give his life as a ransom for many.”

So what implications does this word, gospel, have for us who follow this Jesus fellow? Well, let’s stay with two – a broad implication and a narrow implication. First, the broad implication.

Broad: The broad implication that the gospel has for us is that we are a part of something far larger and more powerful than ourselves. As Roland got at last week when he talked about time, there are things in this world that we have absolutely no power over. The good news is that even though we are powerless about many things, God is more powerful and will see his chosen people through any and all circumstances.

This week I thought I’d day a break from the usual pastoral duties and look at some of the older directories Christ the King has, directories from the last 5 decades. When I was done I thought to myself, “Wow, I think I have just wasted over an hour of time looking at these pictures.”

However, it wasn’t a waste of time. While I was looking those pictures I saw the story of this church, how it grew and how its membership declined over the years. But even more important than that, I got to hear about the stories about a number of families over the last 50 years; families and individuals who went through all sorts of trials and temptations; families who lost parents, children, and relatives to cancer, to accidents, to old age; families who experienced the pains and loss of divorce, of alcoholism, of selfishness and greed. So that leads me to say: Do you all feel comfortable knowing that your pastor knows more about you and your family than

you thought? Just kidding. What all of that leads me to say is: How much more powerful this great God of ours is to keep this community of imperfect believers together? Despite our own failings and short comings, despite our own sin and selfishness, the Gospel of Jesus Christ has still kept this communion of sinners and saints together. Because that is what the broad sense of the Gospel is about too – When we look at the entire biblical story we see that in Jesus Christ God was bridging the gap we make between ourselves and others and in Jesus Christ God bridged the gap we have between us and God himself. So if we step back and look at the larger picture of things, from wombs that gave birth the people of this church to the many tombs of some of those people, God’s will and Word still prevailed here, and will continue to do so.

Narrow: Now, what are the narrow implications of the gospel on each of us individually? The narrow implications of the gospel force us to admit two crucial things about ourselves. The first is that we are sinners, pure and simple. Some people just know this about themselves and don’t need to be told that. However, there are those who don’t want to believe this, and so God sends a preacher like John the Baptist, or someone like Christ the King’s first pastor, Erland Carlson of blessed memory who died this past Thanksgiving Day, or someone like me to bring that truth to light. And believe me, this isn’t the enjoyable part of this calling. But we all do need to be humbled and reminded that we are selfish, we are frauds, that we think more highly of ourselves than we should, that we are so full of sin that we are drowning and we don’t even realize it, and because of that sin we always carry around our necks a divine sentence of death. So like John the Baptist, and any other preacher worth their salt, we call God’s people to repent and to believe. And so as your pastor, I call all of you to live lives of daily repentance. As 2 Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord...is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.”

The second thing we need to admit about ourselves is that we need a savior, pure and simple. This is where the narrow sense of the gospel really comes into effect. When we've been thoroughly humbled and crushed by hearing or knowing how we personally don't measure up to God's standards, in comes the gospel of Jesus Christ to promise and give you everything you and I don't deserve; God himself, wholly and completely. And with God himself comes everything that God brings and gives; true joy, peace, hope, life, salvation and forgiveness. And by the way, this is the best part of my calling to be your pastor; that week after week, day after day, I get to tell you what God has done for you already in Jesus Christ. I get to proclaim to you the scandal of the Gospel – that God loves and forgives people like you and me. As impossible as that might sound, yes, people like you and me. I get to proclaim that the new future God has in store for each and every one of you has already broken into the here and now and all you need to do is believe it! And so I proclaim to you now the good news, the gospel: Jesus Christ, son of God the Father almighty, son of Man born of the Virgin Mary, came to this dark world to die for you, to take your sin, your shame, your guilt and your despair away from you and nailed it to the cross. Forget everything you think about yourself or what others say about you, because in the end none of that matters. The only thing that matters is what God has to say about you now and what God has already done for you on that lonely cross two thousand years ago.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, during the darkness of this season of Advent may the gospel of Jesus Christ, both in the broad sense of you being caught up in God's story and in the narrow sense of being the recipient of God's grace and mercy, be a burning light in your hearts and minds. Amen.