

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Two weeks ago we heard about the power and the significance of baptism. Last week we heard about those two simple words from Jesus, “Follow me.” And today we hear a few things about what following Jesus Christ entails – Knowing, repenting, and believing. So that’s what we’ll focus on are those three aspects of following Jesus Christ – Knowing, repenting, and believing. Each of them deserves a sermon or two of themselves, but we’ll work with this for now. The main verse for this focus will be verse 15 where Jesus says, “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.” And now we’ll turn those thing things: Knowing – Repenting – Believing. And just to warn you, this sermon will be a bit heavy so make sure you’ve got your ears, brains, and hearts prepared.

**Knowing – “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near...”**

We use the word “know” in a number of ways. But that’s not what I want to dwell on here. What we’ll focus on is a very specific kind of knowing. In our focus verse we can hear Jesus say, “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near...” So the knowing that we want to focus on is the knowing that Jesus wants us to know – that being how the time is fulfilled and kingdom of God has come near. With these words Jesus wants to pull all of our attention to himself so that we can see that if we want to know who God is and what kind of God it is that we have, we don’t need to look anywhere else but at Jesus. To know who God is to know Jesus Christ. In the first chapter of John’s gospel we hear that “it is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” So to know God is to know Jesus. But even more than that, to know Jesus is to know he is the kingdom of God who has come near. When we hear

that word, “kingdom,” we tend to think about a place or a piece of land. But when Jesus mentions here the kingdom of God he means to say to us, “I am the kingdom of God.” Because the kingdom of God is not so much a place, but the kingdom of God is a person, the kingdom of God is who Jesus Christ is and what he has come to do. And what has he come to do? He has come to tell us that the time is near, that the jig is up, that we don’t need to go off and find God but that God has come into our very presence and that God is so near to us that we can feel Him breathe down the back of our necks and we know it. Just like how a farmer knows when it’s time to harvest his crops, or how a fisherman knows when it’s time to put the shack on the lake to do ice fishing, Jesus announces to us that now is the time that I am going to come and get you and no matter how much you try to run from Him, he’s going to catch you, hook, line, and sinker. Then we are left to hope that he won’t throw us back, but will keep us and mount us on his wall. So to know God is to know Christ, and to know Christ is to know that God’s kingdom and reign has broken into the here and now and because of that there is nothing to do but get caught by this relentless God of ours.

### **Repenting – “...repent....”**

When we hear the word repent we often think it is simply feeling sorry for the sins we’ve committed. And that’s partly true. However, this word repent is much more than that. When Christ commands us to repent he commands us to wake up. He commands us to look at everything; our life, the way we treat others, the way we treat ourselves, the way we use what He has given us, and how we look at our relationship with God. So to repent is not to change a little thing here or there in our life, but to repent is making a drastic overhaul of everything about us. To repent is to take a totally new perspective on everything. This is something we see in the

story about Jonah, about how a wicked city and people totally change everything about themselves in relation to God, about how they view the world, and about how they treat others. This is something we see commanded in Psalm 62 which encourages us to, “Put your trust in God always, O people, pour out your hearts before the one who is our refuge.” This is something we see in 1 Timothy too, where we see St. Paul wear his heart on his sleeve and admit how wretched a person before he got swept up in God’s mercy and forgiveness. So to repent is not only to see and understand everything in a different light, in light of God’s mercy shown to us in Jesus Christ, but to repent also demands a response from us, that we live our lives differently than we have, that we treat others the way God wants us to, that we use God’s gifts to us for His glory and not selfishly. So to repent is to think differently but also to act differently. And this is why baptism is so important, because each and every day we go back to that promise given to us in baptism, that we have been forgiven and washed clean by Christ’s blood, that God has chosen us for a reason, and that God is about putting to death in us everything that is against Him so that God can raise up the new person in us each and every day.

### **Believe – “...and believe the good news!”**

To believe the good news is nothing else than saying to ourselves, “God, you’re right, I’m wrong, have your way with me and give me everything you promise.” We tend to think that believing is just something we do in our brains when in fact what we believe plays out into every facet of our daily lives. This is why correct belief is so important because if you’re theology is totally in left field, chances are that’s how you’ll treat yourself and others. The important question to ask ourselves is not, “Do you believe in God?” Everyone believes in God, even atheists. The more important question to ask is, “What kind of a God do you believe in?”

So what kind of God do you believe in? (Pause) It makes a huge difference. Here are some examples which might over generalize, but you get the picture. If someone thinks God is only vindictive and only about punishment, chances are they'll live life in fear of God, think of themselves as always worthless, or they'll just simply always be mad at God for not punishing whoever it is they think deserves to be punished. If someone thinks God is all about doing what we say, chances are they think that God is simply a cosmic vending machine that only does what we want Him to do and if He doesn't, well then there must be a problem with God instead of with me. If someone thinks of God only in terms of love and happiness, chances are you'll think that God is some giant pillow to rest your weary head on and that God really could care less about the suffering going on in the world, or even in my life, because how can a loving God let that happen? Or if you think God doesn't care for your daily needs chances are you'll be stingy and selfish with everything you have. And the list could go on. But what this is to say is that theology matters. What you think about God matters. What you believe about God matters. What you believe about God will show in how you live your life, how you treat others, how you treat yourself, and how you look at this world we live in.

What Jesus says to us in this passage is a very specific way of believing – believing the good news of God that is about himself. And what is that good news? We've covered that in other sermons before, but the good news in a nutshell is that God has come to us in Jesus Christ to defeat sin, death, and the devil for us and to break open and give an entirely new future for this world and for each of us sinners who are also saints through baptism.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up all we covered quickly, we looked at knowing – a specific kind of knowing which realizes that God’s future has broken into the here and now. We don’t need to search for God because He has already found us out. We also looked at repenting – having a totally new perspective on ourselves, on our lives, how we live, how we treat others, and a new perspective on our God because of what God has done and is doing through His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. And we looked at believing – the proper way of believing who God is and what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Because if our theology is wrong, the way we look at God’s work and mission in this world will be wrong too. But if our theology is right, the way we look at God’s work and mission, the way we participate in God’s work and mission, the way we are swept away and caught up in God’s work and mission in this world, if our theology is right than there are no simple words that can describe the power and the impact of God in and around us.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, may you continue to be swept away and caught up by this relentless God of ours who will stop at nothing, not even being crucified on a cross, to come so near to us where we can feel Him breathe down the back of our necks. Amen.