“Good News, Indeed”

Mark 1:1-20

Rev. Rebecca Weaver Longino

First Presbyterian Church, Luling, TX

December 27, 2015

I used to love reading books with a lot of descriptive language.

An author could go on and on for pages about something as mundane as a chair, and I would love it.

I used to get lost in a good John Steinbeck novel, lavishing in the world he creates.

And then I had a baby.

And my brain could no longer handle such books.

Lately, I might pick one up, read a few pages, and completely forget what I’d just read.

I get lost in the language and find myself frustrated at not being able to stay focused.

I even find myself selecting the shorter bedtime books when I read to my daughter at night.

The ones with 3-5 words on each page.

Anything more and my brain just can’t handle it.

Sleep deprivation does funny things to one’s brain.

So now, I tend to gravitate toward shorter books.

In the fiction department I go for plot driven books that keep me engaged.

For non-fiction, I prefer ones that just get to the point.

I don’t have the time or the energy to deal with a lot of fluff when I read.

The Gospel according to Mark doesn’t a lot of fluff.

Mark is one of those get to the point kind of authors.

This will work in my favor this year as the lectionary cycle is using Mark from now until Easter.

I confess my “baby brain” as they call it is still healing, though it may be 18 or more years before I get my old brain back!

So I’m looking forward to this time with Mark’s Gospel.

It doesn’t spend a lot of time on details, or offering descriptive language.

It is the shortest of the four gospels and is certainly a focused narrative of Jesus’ life.

It is so focused, that it skips over major events which the other Gospels deem important.

Our text for today is a perfect example of Marks brevity.

Of Marks to-the-point kind of style.

The author jam packs these 20 verses with a lot of information.

Many stories are sort of meshed into just a few paragraphs.

This is a rather interesting way to start out the story.

To breeze through so many events in so little space on the page.

If we look at the other three Gospel texts, we find very different openers to their stories.

Matthew starts out with a genealogy, tying Jesus’ lineage to some of the big names in the Old Testament, David in particular.

Matthew then devotes several chapters to Jesus’ birth, the visit of the Wise Men, their escape to Egypt to hide from Herod.

Matthew spends a great deal of time in Jesus’ early days.

Likewise, Luke spends much time offering details of Jesus’ birth and childhood.

Last week we heard the story of Zecheriah and him finding out that he would have a son.

That his son would be an important person who would prepare the people for the Messiah.

Luke then goes on to give details about John the Baptists’ early life.

Jesus’ early life, complete with his birth narrative which we heard on Christmas Eve.

We have to get through three chapters before we see Jesus as an adult.

And then John, a very different Gospel than the other three, starts out with the beginning of creation.

In the beginning when the Word, aka Jesus, was with God.

John wants to make sure us readers understand the theological side of who Jesus is.

But Mark.

Mark starts out with gusto.

Mark doesn’t waste any time.

This Gospel jumps right in to some of those big events in Jesus’ ministry.

In these first 20 verses, the opening to Mark’s Gospel, a lot of ground is covered.

First, there’s a reminder that the prophet Isaiah foretold of the Messiah long ago.

Lest anyone forget that people have been waiting a long time for the Messiah.

Then we meet John the baptizer, who is out in the wilderness baptizing repentant believers.

Then we see Jesus be baptized.

Mark devotes a whopping 3 sentences to that major event.

Mark then generously offers 2 lines to Jesus’ time of temptation in the wilderness.

Next comes a very quick note that John the Baptist has been arrested, thus his ministry is over.

The way has been made clear for Jesus to step up and begin his ministry.

He calls some guys to be his disciples and then his journey begins.

It almost feels like whiplash to be hurried through all of these events in such a short reading.

Mark seems to write with a sense of urgency.

As though the author is giving a TED talk and only has 5 minutes to make his life changing speech.

No time to waste on details, Mark simply hits on the high points, the ones that people need to hear.

But despite the brevity of this Gospel message, despite the hurried manner in which the text is written,

We can’t overlook the fact that Mark wants people to understand the message and be transformed by it.

Mark truly wants people to hear the story of Jesus and believe in the Good news.

This is part of the reason Mark is an excellent Gospel for new believers or just curious people to begin.

They won’t get bogged down in lengthy family trees or obscure theology.

Mark gets to the point and keeps it simple, while maintaining a focus on the heart of the Gospel message.

Like in verse 15 which really gets to the heart of what Mark wants people to hear.

It is the Good news.

Mark tells us what Jesus was preaching out there in Galilee.

He proclaimed that “the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

It’s a short message, but it’s a loaded one.

Mark will spend the rest of the time revealing what this line means.

It’s sort of a teaser for what is to come in the rest of the Gospel.

Over the next few months, we’ll be looking at the rest of Mark’s Gospel.

Taking a closer look at what Mark means by this statement.

But for now, as we embark on this leg of the Biblical narrative, we sit with the message in the beginning of Mark’s story.

We are given a foundation for the Good News.

That the kingdom of God has come near.

That Jesus calls all people to repent and believe the good news.

Good news.

Right from the start, Mark wants to make it clear that Jesus is the Good News.

The Good News that the people of God had long waited for.

As they lived through times of slavery and drought and exile.

As they experienced the biggest hardships imaginable.

Their hope was kept alive in this Good News that was to come.

When the Roman Empire took control and the people were oppressed, the Good News that Jesus brought was a hopeful message.

One they desperately needed to hear.

2000 years later, we still need this Good News.

We still need to be reminded daily of our need for Jesus.

As the world continues to turn with violence and injustice.

As there seems to be more bad news filling the airwaves than good.

We need this Good News.

This Good News which speaks of healing and love.

Reconciliation and grace.

We need this radical message with stands in contrast to the message being preached by the secular world.

We need this Good News to fill our hearts and remind us that God is with us.

That we are never forgotten nor forsaken.

This Good News which Mark tells us about is a gift to us all.

As we continue through this Christmas season, with 10 more days to go.

Let us treasure this gift that God has given us.

Let us give thanks for the Good News that is Jesus Christ.

And let’s not keep this gift to ourselves.

It’s one that is best when shared with others.

We as Christians can make it known that this Good news is for all people.

That God’s love is for all people in the gift of Christ.

The one who comes to redeem us and care for us and love us.

This is Good News, indeed.