

**Momentous**  
**Sermon for Cashmere Presbyterian for Sunday 31 January 2021**  
**Rev Hamish Galloway**

**Text: Mark 1: 14-20**

**Introduction**

Our daughter's wedding is a year away. Yesterday she sent out the 'save the date' messages to friends and family. The anticipation builds towards this momentous day. I am to walk her down the aisle and conduct the ceremony – will I be able to control the tears?

I remember a similar sense of anticipation and build up to our son's wedding. But I also remember that when the moment of marriage actually arrived it was over in a flash ... I was in a kind of daze, I wanted to slow the moment down, cherish the moment, but before I knew it, it was gone.

Since then I have made a point of saying to couples I marry, "This will go quickly, stay in the moment, savour it, don't let your mind be filled with other things, concentrate and seize this momentous moment of marriage!"

This idea captures the timeless truth of Mark 1: 14 -20. It is all about a Momentous Moment, a Momentous Calling and a Momentous Movement. The urgent message to then and now is don't miss this magic moment!

**1. Momentous Moment**

If a one year wait for a wedding builds anticipation towards a moment, then think about this: the Jewish people had been waiting for centuries for the Messiah who would herald the coming of God's kingdom. The sense of expectation was palpable.

The first key idea of this passage is: this is the moment you were waiting for.

It comes out in a number of ways, including

- John's imprisonment – this signals transition. John the pre-runner is out of the way leaving the stage prepared for Jesus to step onto it.
- Jesus' words are brief but packed with a sense of 'now'
- The time... the word in Greek is 'kairos', meaning a special moment in time...has come – the word is 'piero', meaning fulfilled or to fill up, to make complete; the idea that the long held expectations of a Messiah are fulfilled in this moment and in this person.
- 'The kingdom of God is near' –'near' meaning 'at hand, close'. These people knew, as we do, that all is not right with the world. It is not the peaceful loving planet we long for! They longed for the reign of God's love, displacing the reign of despotic oppressive political leaders! Jesus is saying this is the moment when this new kingdom breaks in to human existence! But how so?

**2. Momentous Movement**

It is embodied in a person who is rallying others to join the movement!

There is something interesting here. this movement that begins in this moment is short on content at this point. Jesus' words are very brief – 'the kingdom is near, get on board.'

I was thinking of this in terms of other movements. For example, communism has an extensive manifesto that spells out what you are signing up for. As an idea it has its attraction. But interestingly, the embodiment of the manifesto in places like Russia and China are for me far from attractive!

In the case of Jesus, the manifesto is not set out in words but in action. The commentator Nineham points out the next couple of chapters of Mark are a 'specimen day' in the life of the Messiah, where the manifesto of this kingdom of God is embodied and lived out, not just fine looking words on paper. So we see Jesus combating evil, using a healing touch to the sick, lonely and weary, withdrawing for prayerful communion with God, bring forgiveness and wholeness to people wracked with guilt, confronting religious legalism!

This then is the kingdom. This is the movement that arrives from God on earth in the God/Man Jesus! God breaks in to our existence with a kingdom embodied in and acted out by Jesus. How do we get on board?

### 3. **Momentous Calling**

There are moments that change our lives! Like the moment Graham McCormick first saw Pauline across the road in Sumner that eventually led to 65 years of lovely marriage!

In this case, Jesus calls the brothers Andrew and Simon, James and John, to leave their careers and families and come follow him and then and there they do!

It sounds a bit extreme! Some scholars suggest there must have been things before this in the story that are not recorded. Maybe Jesus, his message and his calling were not new to them *and* this is just the moment of decision?

*But* this is not how Mark writes the story. In keeping with his quick fire, action packed, fast moving gospel they sense the momentous moment and intuitively respond!

What is the point Mark is making? I think it is this: the world is a mess in need of fixing, here is the fixer, get on board! Make a decision to work for the kingdom of God and make it the priority calling of your life! The task is urgent!

*And* he is saying

Do you believe it?

If yes, then

Repent

and

Follow Jesus' calling on your life.

Repent is a key word in this whole segment of God's salvation history. It was key to John's message, it is now repeated by Jesus.

Repent literally means to 'change ones mind' and in its New Testament usage to 'turn back or turn around'. Nineham puts it this way:

*"it means to come to ones senses, deliberately turning away from your sinful self or sinful past and turning towards God with a corollary change of conduct."*

Two illustrations that help me, one to do with direction, the other who we follow.

A couple of weeks ago, in the early hours of the morning, a couple turned the wrong way onto the Wellington highway at Petone. They travelled 10km down the wrong way before a terrible accident took their lives! We nearly had the same fate. Late last year we were coming home from a friends place out by Halket when we struck the new road conditions of the Southern Motorway. We got lost and confused and I turned onto the highway, heading back towards Christchurch, but on the wrong side of the highway! Anne assertively proclaimed *we are going the wrong way turn*

*around now!* Pride hurt, but grudgingly accepting the truth, I turned around before catastrophe hit.

So it is with the direction of our lives! Are we moving in the direction of love, hope, peace .... Are we in that flow or not?

There is a stunning example of repentance in Philip Yancey's book "What's so Amazing About Grace?"

This world famous, renowned Christian writer confesses:

*"I grew up a racist ....In the 1960s my church had lookout squads who patrolled the entrances to the church on Sundays 'lest any black troublemakers try integrate with us'....'we used to call Martin Luther King jr "Martin Luther Coon".*

And yet he goes on to talk about how the words and actions of Martin Luther King transformed his own thinking and life.

*"The power of grace evident in his life disarmed my own stubborn evil."*

Philip Yancey repented of racism!

What attitudes or ideas still dog me and separate me from the flow of God's grace in the world?

The second example comes from my visit to the 2009 British Open Golf in Turnberry, Scotland. I was there for 3 days and had to decide which golfer I would follow. I started out with Michael Campbell, the New Zealander, but he was playing badly and had a temper to match it. I changed then to Tiger Woods. I followed him assiduously for 2 days but it was not the right choice – he did not even make the cut. In hindsight I should have followed Tom Watson, who at the age of 49 nearly pulled off one of the greatest victories in a major golf tournament, only pipped at the last post in a play-off with Stewart Cink. In fact on the practice day I was collecting autographs on a hat. Tom Watson walked past me and I decided, no, not him! What a mistake! I followed the wrong person.

Who do I really follow in life? I want to follow Jesus and answer his call to be part of this kingdom of love and light that he heralded all those years ago. A kingdom so 'near' when we see acts of love, reconciliation, mercy and forgiveness in our worlds, yet so urgently needed in the face of ongoing evil!

Here's the thing – just as Jesus embodied this kingdom, he calls us to do the same. To be part of the movement called the Body of Christ! In Hebrews 10:16 Jeremiah is quoted – God doesn't want a dry manifesto written on paper, but one 'written on hearts and minds.' That we would be one with Christ, Christ in us and us in Christ. That this kingdom be lived out by each of us changing this world bit by bit!