

Epiphany III Year B 2012

“And immediately they left their nets and followed him.”

Back in High School, Katharine and I both had a chemistry teacher named Ned Jenne, not at the same time... Katharine was two years younger than I...I guess she still is...But Ned Jenne was a fabulous teacher, one of the best I've ever had... and I think he is still teaching...He and his family were Mormons, which for South Alabama in the early seventies, was something of a novelty...He was quiet spoken, kind of nerdy, pocket protector and all, even though he had played football at Washington State....We had an ongoing argument as to which football conference was the greater the SEC or the Pac ten...I wish he were here....whatcha think now Ned!?...Being quite the perfectionist, he required us to work hard, inspired us to work hard, demanded precision, taught us how to use a slide rule... all the while keeping a good sense of humor....One of our running jokes with him was that as time was running out in class, someone would invariably ask him what time it was....and it wasn't enough for him to just look at his watch and say “two minutes 'til....No he would look at his watch while raising a finger on his other hand...and say 9:53 and 20 seconds... as he said twenty seconds he would mark the air, as if there actually existed such a time and space in the cosmic ether...we of course would crack up...and he would smile sheepishly recognizing his perfectionist neurosis up and against one of the great mysteries we call time....musicians have to be ultra conscious of time...aware of the perfect end of a half note relative to the piece of music being played... the end of the half note, a perfect mystery, a place in time, the now amid the vast order of things.

There are several themes being played out in the Gospel of Mark from which we will read mostly all this church year...this being year B... you know that, why we read what we read from Sunday to Sunday....next year Luke, then Matthew, then Mark again with John sprinkled in from time to time mostly in Easter....but there are several unique themes being played out in this gospel. One principal theme is the theme of Baptism and the Baptized.... we know this because the prologue tells us so...In Aristotelian poetics we are taught that the prologue in rhetoric predetermines the principal idea of the rhetoric...so that's what we have here...this is a narrative about the Baptized since we begin with the Baptism of Jesus....everything must be read as it relates to Baptism....It is for the Baptized to feed....it is for the Baptized to heal...it is for the baptized to call out injustice...It is for the Baptized to descend the mountain into the fray of existence... we'll talk more about that

as the year wears on....this gospel is also about resurrection....Even though quite ironically there is no resurrection appearance of Jesus in this gospel (which is no accident on the author's part) the word for resurrection is shot through this gospel....particularly in the healing stories.... Jesus commands the little girl presumed dead to stand up....Jesus tells the paralytic to stand...take up his bed and walk....the man with the withered hand, Jesus asks to stand up and come and be healed....there are many similar stories in this gospel in which the word stand is used....and that word is the same Greek root word for resurrection....so the Baptized, our principal theme, are to be about the business of resurrection ...not some rarified magic feat...but resurrection in the day to day...we'll talk more about that as well.

But today I want to talk about another recurring theme in Mark and that is the theme of time...time that great mystery...I tried reading *A Brief History of Time*, which was supposed to be lay friendly and after 40 or so pages I decided it's just fine for time to remain a mystery with me. Biblical scholars have for countless centuries taken up the issue of time in scripture... the seven days of creation, Methuselah living to be a 1000 years old...the recurring typology of 40days...the mysterious time of the end of days...on and on, but perhaps the most ink concerning time has been spilt concerning the arrival of God's reign in earth....You've heard me preach that there is a decided tension in the gospels, and much more so in Paul...that on the one hand there is evidence of the coming kingdom before our eyes....but on the other, the final coming, the final consummation of heaven and earth is yet to come...I've coined this the now and the not yet of the kingdom aka the commonweal of God...a tension in which we live our lives of faith....For most theologians over the history of Christian thought the option as been decidedly the latter...most theologians would argue that though we are in the so-called "last days" and see hints of this coming new creation we still live in a world yet to be redeemed....my gosh look around at the violence and squalor and injustice....It's hard not to think that way... these scholars and theologians and thinkers are called millenarianists (taken from the evolved church doctrine that Christ will return after a proverbial thousand years)....that's most of Christianity I think....that we live amid a vale of tears until one day God will be all in all...this manner of thinking has all kinds of ramifications, for example: why bother to take ecological care of the planet when everything is going to be set right in the end....why worry about healthcare when everyone will be restored in the sweet by and by....and the insidious thing about this kind of theology is that it enables us to abdicate our responsibilities as people of faith, as the body of Christ for our world

and the people who live in it... because the need is now; the need is not in the by and by.

In Mark's gospel there is one word that occurs more than any other word...and remember this gospel would have been heard not read...so this word the hearer would hear refrain-like...and that word is immediately. It's in today's reading twice in one paragraph....and they immediately left their nets....and a few chapters later the paralytic immediately stood up and took the mat and went out before all the people.....

This gospel is fast paced...Mark lays down no family lineage as to Jesus of Nazareth as do Luke and Matthew...Mark doesn't bother with eloquent and soaring and metaphysical theology as does John in John's prologue...Mark gets right down to business...John the Baptist announces Jesus...Jesus is Baptized...and immediately (there's the word again) immediately he is driven out into the desert...Mark skips the temptations.... Jesus immediately calls his disciples...people who will learn the pattern of the true life from him (disciples means "learners")...and then begins healing.... and feeding ...and healing...and calling out the injustices of his world...marking in the ether the pattern, the immediate pattern...the truth of who we are before God....and after his crucifixion, we are told by a young man dressed in white (An initiate...remember this is all about Baptism) a young newly baptized announcing Jesus' resurrection and pointing back to Galilee, where this ministry all started....and the pattern begins again.

For Mark, the time of God's reign...the time for God being in charge... the time of the consummation of heaven and earth is now...there's no "not yet" for Mark...He mentions the Son of Man coming in glory, but that is a continuation of what is occurring as we speak....time for Mark is the space of God's realm, ever present...present time, present space...We of course know in modern physics about the intimate relationship between time and space, their relativity and relationship.... This earth and its people, its wounds notwithstanding, is the place, the space for God's commonweal, in which healing is already a part of the created order, in which feeding and giving drink is the way we live...taking care of our neighbor....living predisposed to hospitality....artfully and gracefully calling out in enlightened learning the injustices of our world...this is the God pattern onto which we are called to live our lives forever beginning now....and here....there is no by and by...only now and here.

When will God come in all of God's glory, when will we see Jesus face to face...when will the Spirit make new the whole of creation....At every moment of healing...in every moment of care...in every act of love and sacrifice...Christ comes in great clouds of glory...When will this wished for,

hoped for, waited for thing come, this thing for which we gather as a community, this thing we celebrate, this thing the reason we are here...when will this thing come....NOW.