

Sunday 22nd January 2012 Grahamstown Cathedral 7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		3rd Sunday of the Year B Epiphany 3
Jonah 3:1-5, 10	Ps 62:5-12	1 Cor 7:29-31
		Mark 1:14-20
REPENT, BELIEVE, FOLLOW		

“The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (Mk 1:15)

In the days when many people travelled by train, the overnight trip was a highlight. Once or twice we as a family caught the 4 p.m. Port Elizabeth train that left each day from Cape Town station, to arrive in George sometime the following morning, having journeyed through the night. There would be those special railway dining room meals, and then those funny beds; not to mention the toilets. And the constant sound of the train wheels on the tracks; and every so often there would be that exciting clackety-clackety clack as we went over a set of points. There were certain turning points on the journey: railway staff had to make sure that the tracks were set so that we headed in the right direction. Otherwise there would be disaster. The points had to be changed at the right time. Our safety depended on the railway staff doing their job – because if they didn’t, we could end up in Graaff-Reinet or Bloemfontein, instead of George; or even worse, we could hit an oncoming train.

Our readings

Our scripture readings speak to us of the right time, the turning point, the moment of decision, the choice that has to be made – and the results of that choice.

Jonah, having survived his three days in the belly of the whale, finally finds his vocation as a prophet, and preaches to the people of Nineveh. They hear the word spoken to them; they repent and turn from all that is wrong, and are saved from destruction. (Jonah 3)

In our Gospel reading, we are given a summary of Jesus' ministry of preaching and healing: "Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: 'The time has arrived; the kingdom of God is upon you. Repent, and believe the gospel.'" (Mk 1:14b-15) Then follows the call of the first disciples, their moment of decision, their response to that call. "At once they left their nets.... left their father Zebedee in the boat ... and followed Jesus." (Mk 1:18, 20)

The summary...

"The time has arrived..." "Now is the time of fulfilment..." the word used for "time" is "kairos". It means not so much the time of day, but rather the "right" time. The moment of decision – the railwayman has to change the points at the right time to send the train on the correct track. The captain of the ship has to choose the course for the ship to avoid the rocks. The time of fulfilment, the moment we've been waiting for, the big celebration, the birthday party or wedding we've been planning for months, and finally everything comes together. But it can also mean a time of crisis which demands an immediate response. That time, Jesus said, is upon us. The *kairos* moment, the time of fulfilment of the ancient prophecies, but which also demanded a decision, was the coming of Jesus into the world.

"... the kingdom of God is upon you..." – the rule and reign of God is at hand, is amongst us – not only in heaven, but right here, in our midst.

"...repent..." – change your life around. Turn from all that is wrong and destructive and self-centred.

"...believe in the gospel." – put your trust and faith in the good news, the love of God which has come to us, the love of God which is amongst us.

Kairos

The *kairos* time, the *kairos* moment, the moment of decision. The start of the new year is a *kairos* time. We make choices. We plan ahead. We look to the future. In a few weeks time students returning to Rhodes will choose courses and career paths. Decisions we make now impact on us for years to come. Just as Jesus called those first disciples to follow him, so the Lord calls you and me, to follow him; to trust in him and walk with him in the year ahead. This call of God on our lives is a *kairos* moment: it is a moment of decision. How will we respond, today, this week, next month, when we hear God's call?

As a church we face a long-drawn-out *kairos* time, a time of choice, of decision, as member Churches in the Anglican Communion consider the Anglican Covenant and the extent to which this will help us live together with all our differences. Here in the life of the Cathedral, we face a *kairos* time as we prepare for our annual Vestry, and identify priorities, plan, vision, for the year ahead. What is the Lord's call to us?

Here in the Eastern Cape Province, we face a *kairos* time, a time of crisis, in our Education department, as teachers go on strike, a week after the start of the new school year. What is the Lord's call? What is best for the education of our children?

As a nation we face a *kairos* time with the 100th anniversary of the founding of the ANC, and the future direction of the ruling party. It is right to congratulate the party on this milestone, and for what has been achieved over the years; but many are also calling on the ANC "to eradicate corruption, factionalism, selfish individualism, power struggles, ill discipline, and most of all the scandalous neglect of the poor."¹ And this past Friday, at the funeral of Archdeacon Mzikazi,

¹ *Theological and Ethical Reflections on the 2012 Centenary Celebrations of the African National Congress*. Kairos Southern Africa. 28th December 2011, pg 17

the Bishop of Grahamstown called on the ANC to return to its spiritual, Christian roots and acknowledge the lordship of Christ.

We as the church, the people of God, must avoid the two traps of what is called “state theology” – the belief that the church should keep out of politics, and preach the gospel, while the state runs the country; and “church theology” – the belief that Christians should be politically neutral, and simply get on with the life of the church, the “spiritual” life. We are here to teach the Christian faith, we are here to be a signpost to God, we are here to nurture the inner life and to encourage one another. We are here to be alongside the poorest of the poor, to hold to the gospel values of justice, equality, and care for all people.

Conclusion

Our Gospel readings for the last few Sundays have taken us on a journey – a journey with Jesus; our own journey of faith and life. We began two weeks ago with the baptism of Jesus: baptism, the moment of our beginning as Christians, new life, new birth. Last Sunday, we heard the words of John the Baptist, pointing to Jesus: behold the Lamb of God! Here is the one sent by God! Follow him! Today we have the call – repent, believe, follow. Like the first disciples, we follow Jesus in ministry and witness to a broken and hurting world.

We can only do this as we draw our strength from God. In the words of the psalm for today: “In God is my deliverance and my glory: God is my strong rock and my shelter. Trust in him at all times O my people: pour out your hearts before him for God is our refuge.” (Ps 62:7-8).