

### A LINE HAS BEEN DRAWN

The thing about the Bible is that, if we are unable to develop a clear understanding of it in personal terms, then, frankly, it is just some old history book, whose contents bear no relevance or no importance to our lives. If we understand it differently, however, it is discovered to be addressing itself to our situations.

Take, for example, the two verses from Mark's gospel account, as read this morning. As reported, they comprise Jesus' first official message to the people--if you will, his first sermon.

"The time is fulfilled," he says, "and the kingdom of God is near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mk 1.15). It is very short, very to the point, and very fraught with meaning for 1<sup>st</sup> Century hearers.

In its original context, the proclamation is one of the impending End of things--the "end of the world," we would say. Jesus publicly announces that the time has come for that End, beyond whose tribulations and terrors would follow the "kingdom of God," a time of blessing for the poor and the marginalized. In preparation for that Godly kingdom, one needs to become a bit more God-fearing oneself, by repenting of one's old ways, in true John the Baptist fashion, and giving them up.

Truly, such a message as that would stir people of Jesus' day, a people straining to exist under the impoverishing, intolerant boot of Rome. But how exactly do such verses serve us in any meaningful way?

Unless you're a Jehovah's Witness, or a member of some other doomsday church excitedly courting this Endtime in our own time, such a proclamation at this literal level has no contemporary meaning whatever.

This is where some capacity for deeper interpretation is so indispensable. If Jesus' pithy sermon can be freed from the prison of literal thinking, then it is discovered to carry a message for us, especially for us, in our situation here.

The message for us is this: The time here is ripe! A fabulous future is at hand! In order to receive it, we have only to give up our self-defeating, old ways of thinking, and instead embrace the great news of this possibility!

Interpreted personally, then, Jesus is heard to suggest that God is ready to do something momentous with us. A distinct line of sorts has been drawn by God between what has been and what can be. The future can be more than the past has been. Therefore, a climactic ending of sorts is taking place, a marvelous new beginning is opening up to us. And, as God prepares to implement this astounding new initiative among us, the thing that we have to do is to allow for a shift in mindset, which paves the way for a shifting of everything else.

What I am calling a shift in mindset is what is implicit in the old word "repentance." Since that old term smacks of sin, unrighteousness, and the prospects of hellfire--not exactly categories that we use in our daily lives--it would be helpful to reframe its meaning in a fresh way.

That can be done, actually, by returning to the ancient Greek, the language in which the gospel is written, where we find that the word behind the imperative verb, "(you) repent" or "repent (all of you)" (*metanoieite*) is the noun *metanoia*. It turns out to be a very insightful word.

While trying not to get too arcane here, the word *metanoia* is one with two parts--*meta*, meaning "beyond" (as in "metaphysics," beyond physics; "meta-analysis," beyond basic analysis, etc.) and *noia*, from *nous*, meaning "mind" (as in "paranoia," beside the mind).

Quite precisely, then, *metanoia*, this “repentance” to which Jesus is pointing people, is literally a “change of mind,” essentially a renewal or enlargement of mind--as I have said, a fundamental shift in mindset. In basic psychological terms, the only thing that stands between good people and a better future is their own poor thinking.

If we believe we're failing, we're right; and believing that, we'll behave in such a manner as to assure it. If, on the other hand, we genuinely believe we'll prevail and thrive, we will; and believing that instead, we'll behave in such manners as to increase the possibilities for them. The only way to get from believing we'll fail to believing that we'll prevail is a wholesale change in our thinking and feeling. That is *metanoia*.

In terms of Jesus' encouragement, there is no taking to heart of the “good news” that is being proclaimed if poor thinking neutralizes or rejects it before that can be effectively accomplished. It is *metanoia*, then, that allows for the sort of consciousness where people can, in fact, see, and will, in deed support the new thing that God is doing.

Have you caught something of the good news here yet?

It can be said that, in general, God is always drawing that line between what has been and what can be for us, in an effort of springing us free to our own greater possibilities. It doesn't ultimately matter how good, or how bad, our yesterday was. God's focus is on a pregnant, pivotal present, that opens to us all sorts of possibilities for the future--provided that we get ourselves out of our own ways.

With St. John's in particular in mind, the implications here are stirring. Let us awaken to the fact that this is the time when things are ripening for us to undertake and accomplish some new thing. Truly, given our potential these days, if not now, when? What could we ever be waiting for?

And let us also awaken to the fact that we are those to whom the invitation is presently given to share in this mind-changing, world-altering moment. If not us, then, really, who? After all, we are the ones who are here at this moment. For what group of geniuses or giants are we waiting?

We are the ones that we have been waiting for. Potentially, we are the generation that future generations will be talking about and giving thanks for. If this new thing is going to happen at St. John's Church, then it's set to happen with us and through us. We have no further to look than to ourselves.

Perhaps we now have a greater sense of the urgency that characterizes Jesus' first sermon to the people. What a moment it is where we find ourselves! In this situation here, in our own time, God has drawn one of those lines!

Let us reiterate the “breaking news”: The time is ripe to the point of bursting. We have suffered and languished enough, we have made our excuses and undermined ourselves enough. God's new initiative here is poised for release and expression. Let us inwardly embrace and outwardly evidence a shift of mind that allows for our old to fall away, in order that the new can come.

“See,” God says through the prophet Isaiah, “I am about to do a new thing. Now it springs forth. Do you not perceive it?” (Is 43.19).

Well, do we?

One person at a time, the answer to that depends wholly on our mindset.

As for yours, does it support what God is about to undertake?