

Pastor T.C. Arnold
St. Mark the Evangelist
April 25th, 2021
Isaiah 52:7-10

This day, April 25th, is known in the church as St. Mark the Evangelist day. Mark, also known as John Mark in the book of Acts, was one of those privileged few who traveled and “evangelized” with Paul during one of his missionary journeys. But, he fell out of the good graces of Paul when he deserted him in Pamphylia. Mark went instead to Perga while Paul went to Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. This caused an argument between Paul and Barnabas because Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them on their next journey but Paul already had enough of Mark. Mark and Barnabas journeyed by themselves, sailing to Cyprus while Paul took Silas and went to Syria and Cilicia.

Mark was an Evangelist and the Gospel that bears his name which came from his hand and inspired by the Holy Spirit is indicative of such. Mark is all about the gospel in action. One of my professors at the seminary used to say that Mark’s Gospel is the “Jesus Christ, Superstar” Gospel of the New Testament. Jesus performs a miracle and then Mark wrote that He immediately went and did something else amazing. The shortest of the four Gospels is truly the “Gospel in action” Gospel. Jesus’ deeds are recounted more than His teaching, although there’s a good deal of that as well.

And for this day that we remember St. Mark, we also have appointed a reading from the prophet Isaiah. It, too, has a “Gospel in action” theme. Listen to these words again:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news (by the way, the “good news” is the gospel), who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’”

Allow me to “paint a picture” for you. The region where Jerusalem sits is surrounded by mountains. A messenger coming to the city with news would have to cross those mountains to get there. A messenger was usually sent to bring news... usually good news of victory over the enemy. This verse tells of such a victory brought by a messenger with feet that run to share the good news. This victory is won by the Lord over the enemies we know as the devil and sin. This news is the publication of peace that can only come from God. This news is the publication of salvation which will see its fulfillment in the coming Messiah. The messenger who comes, who evangelizes, says (as does Isaiah) “Your God reigns.”

Israel’s enemies fail and God reigns. The devil loses... and God reigns. Sin is defeated... and God reigns. That’s the story the Evangelist shares. That’s what the people need so desperately. Your God reigns. The headline of headlines.

With the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the middle of the 15th century, it is said that he conferred a greater gift to the world than Christopher Columbus discovering America. But, of course, that gift, like all gifts must be used correctly. You may have heard the story of the young reporter who was sent on assignment to cover a bridge-opening ceremony. He came back empty-handed and explained to the editor that he couldn’t get the story because the bridge collapsed. The reporter forgot that his real task was to report the news.

The good news about Jesus Christ seemed to collapse when Jesus died and would scarcely have been reported but for His glorious resurrection we celebrate this season. The church does not forget its assignment, just like Isaiah mentions, to publish the good news. The church does well not to forget what St. Mark and others in the New Testament would do – evangelize the masses.

The Hebrew word for “publish” in our text actually means “to hear” (*shama*) or, in this case, “to cause to hear.” So the beautiful feet that are upon the mountain has the gospel to share and he not only shares it, but causes us to hear it. He “publishes” peace right into our ears. He “publishes” salvation... that is... he causes us to hear with our ears that are connected to our hearts the life that God gives to us. Pay close attention to how emphatic the Evangelist with beautiful feet who breaches the mountain top shares this life-giving word. The Evangelist “causes us to hear” it. He publishes it right into our lives... into our hearts.

Now compare that to the way that we sometimes actually hear words. Sometimes when we hear, the word we hear does not get “published.” In other words, the words we hear go in one ear and out the other. Men are especially good at allowing the word of their wives find its way through one ear, totally bypassing the brain, and then somehow floating out the other side without comprehending what in the world was actually said. Men are good at this when their wives speak, but in reality, all of us are good at hearing but not really listening... or having the word “cause an effect” on us.

Beloved, don’t allow God’s Word to do that in your life – float in one ear and out the other without cause and effect. The law of God, that which God tells us to do and not to do, needs to be internalized by Christians and, subsequently, the world. This is the reason why we hear in that familiar liturgical prayer... *BLESSED Lord, who has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them...* We are good at allowing the law to pass by our hearts and be ignored in our lives. We pay less attention... intentionally... although we know we shouldn’t and we know the Word. We hear it, but we don’t want to do it. For this, repent! Listen to and live God’s law. Live out your Christian life in the way that is God pleasing.

The Evangelist’s herald... whether that be St. Mark or any other proclaimer of God’s Word... is carried along by the work of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit “causes you to hear” the Word of peace... the Word of salvation. And this is what Isaiah is emphatic at wanting you to hear. It’s the same message as Mark’s good news: The Lord Reigns! He is the King above all kings. He is the Savior of the world. He lives and he triumphs over sin, death and the devil.

The Gospel of Jesus is not a “in one ear and out the other” Word. It has staying power. And hearing it time and time again is a good thing. The words of eternal life are always good. But to hear also means to put into action. Your wife says, “Go get the milk,” you might want to go get some milk. Get up and get to it. In such a more wonderful way, the gospel is a Word that does not begin with Jesus and then end with us. The Word of the gospel is shared... by Evangelists... that is, by you. The good news does not end here, but goes out into the world from the lips and the lives of you who are gathered here to take what you get and share it with the world. Publish God’s peace. Publish, on their hearts, the Word of salvation. The Holy Spirit causes others to hear what you hold so dear in your heart. Be like the one with beautiful feet who breached the mountain top with good news. Be like St. Mark.

Mark wasn’t perfect, and neither are we. Remember, he deserted Paul. But thanks be to God, he has a redeemer and so do we. Our mistakes are forgiven. And we can do better. Beloved, do better. Not because it will save your soul, but because God has entrusted to you the vocation of being a Christian. And, He desires all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the faith. This is not my job alone. This is our job.

But Thanks be to God that we are not alone. And in this Easter season we will talk more and more about how the Holy Spirit is with us each and every one of our days. So when we plant, God waters. He never leaves us alone. And we always have the promise of the gospel that is published in our hearts that reminds us that Jesus is with you always to the very end of the age. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.