

Zion's UCC of Taborton

January 21, 2018

Rev. Pat Raup

*Now Is the Time*

Mark 1: 1-15

In the Gospel passage we just heard we learned A LOT about John the Baptist. He was considered to be the messenger that the prophet Isaiah had foretold. He was preparing the way for the Lord. He preached in the wilderness, not in town, not in a synagogue. His message was that people needed to change their hearts and ask God to forgive their sins. He baptized these people in the waters of the river Jordan – and, yes, he most likely dunked them beneath the water, clothed or unclothed. He wore clothes of camel hair, ate locusts and wild honey [perhaps a bit like those lollipops our granddaughter gave Konrad for Christmas]. He told people that someone stronger than he was coming, someone more significant. He proclaimed that while he baptized people with water, the coming one would baptize with the Spirit.

We tend to remember these items about John the Baptist because they are colorful and spark our imaginations. However, the really important point in these first 8 verses is to declare that John the Baptist IS NOT THE MESSIAH and that he

knows that. This was important because at that time lots of people DID think that John was the Messiah.

Then we learn a few things about Jesus. He came from Nazareth in Galilee. He was baptized by John [more about that at a later time]. As he came up out of his baptismal waters Jesus saw and heard a vision [we don't really know if anyone else saw and/or heard it] in which God addressed him as Son, as loved, as a source of happiness to God. But that sweet moment didn't last long according to Mark. Jesus was immediately forced into the wilderness, not by Satan but by the Spirit. He remained there 40 days, tempted by Satan, living amongst the wild animals and being taken care of by angels [whatever angels are, but, then again, that's a topic for another time...] Hmmmm.....Jesus of Nazareth turned out to be the Messiah hidden in their midst.

And once he was revealed, what did Jesus do? He proclaimed, loudly and clearly that: "NOW IS THE TIME! HERE COMES GOD'S KINGDOM! CHANGE YOUR HEARTS AND LIVES, AND TRUST THIS GOOD NEWS!" Remember, Jesus spoke these words in Aramaic, not English; but I can't read or pronounce Aramaic, so American English it will have to be.

NOW IS THE TIME! That's it, that's all that I want you to take away with you this morning. The Kingdom of God is here and has been here forever. God has been trying for a long, long

time to tell us that all we ever get is the here and now, so it's up to us to make the most of the here and now, to think, pray and behave as followers of Jesus and lovers of God. There's a fancy theological term that captures this concept and these ARE words that I can pronounce and I have fun saying. The term is an in-breaking, partially realized eschatology. Impressed? You don't have to be and you don't have to remember those words, but I would like you to think about the concepts: the Kingdom of God is already here; Jesus came to show us more about it through his life and death; but the Kingdom is not yet fully formed; it needs to continue to grow and develop according to the love God showed us in Jesus and Jesus showed to the world; and we have to continue that work. What all this might mean for the way we think about heaven and hell is, once again, a topic for another time....

Let's get back to NOW, here at Zion's. First item is our wonderful, energy filled children. I just love having young people at worship with us, from the babies and toddlers who are known to make their needs known loudly [and that never bothers me] to the pre-school and elementary age kids who are eager to learn and participate, and on to the high school and young adults who are bursting to ask us tough questions [yes, that is welcome, too]. They are all a gift and they are all part of the Kingdom NOW. Let us welcome them and encourage them. It is the work of the entire congregation, not just the Sunday

School teachers, good as they are, to disciple them. What do I mean by disciple them? I mean lead them by your own example in worshipping, in treating one another with dignity and respect and helping them to take on new roles in this community when they are eager and ready to do so. If there is one thing that I have learned over the years working with young people it is that they want to participate and they want to be well prepared for that participation so they can “do it right”. I have also learned over the course of a lifetime that our young people are always paying attention to what we do, especially when we think they are not....

What else is NOW the time for? NOW is the time to reach out to those members of Zion's who are no longer worshipping with us. There are probably a variety of reasons for this, but if you think an apology or an explanation is needed, offer it. Let them know that it is a new day here on the mountain; that we are open to learning new ways to resolve our conflicts. We are ready to move forward. You might also mention that, at least occasionally, we smile and laugh. Everyone is welcome to return and anyone who might want to give us a try is also welcome. One does not need to be an official member of Zion's to worship with us. As our opening hymn tells us: ALL ARE WELCOME.

Stay tuned.....AMEN