

*14Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” 16As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 17And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” 18And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.*

It happens to me far too often. You will think me foolish when I tell you. I get out of the car after a days work, I gather the mail, a book or two, a package for Sue that has been mailed to the church, my empty lunch bag, an empty coffee mug, who knows what else but my hands and arms are full. I manage to shut the car door with an elbow, I hang onto everything even as I hook the screen door with my little finger and swing it open, holding it back with a shoulder. But then I face the moment of truth. The door to the house is shut – I will have to turn the knob. So with a full hand I try to put enough pressure against the knob to get it to turn. But then things start shifting – a book begins to fall and as I try to keep it from happening I lose control of most everything else. Suddenly my hands and arms are empty – my load on the ground.

Sometimes I just need to let go in order to take grasp hold.

Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.” It is as if in that moment the world had come to a doorway – a door opening to God’s rule over all. The kingdom of God has come near. Love and healing and hope and sharing had come near. The binding of all evil and the freeing of every good had come near. Repent was the first command Jesus gave.

Repent.

Repenting is a letting go. Now most often we think of that letting go as turning away from evil. That is how the repentance of the people of Nineveh is described in the first lesson. They turned from their evil ways. Now while we are not told what those evil ways were we can imagine – drunkenness, dishonesty in business, abuse of women and children, malicious gossip – we do not need to know anything about that society to know that these sort of things happened there and that these things are not good. I think of the repentance John the Baptist demanded as this repentance from evil - letting go of those things that harm yourself or others. But this does not seem to be the kind of repentance Jesus proclaimed. Now that does not mean that if you or I are living in ways that are harmful to ourselves or others that Jesus does not want us to change. But turning from evil ways is not the only kind of repenting Jesus calls us to do.

Consider Peter and Andrew, James and John. They were fishermen. There was nothing evil about their profession. Yet Jesus called them away. Follow me and I will make you fish for people, he invited and they left their nets and family and followed. They let go of a whole world and a whole life to grasp hold of the kingdom of God living Jesus called them to.

There was another man Jesus called like this: this man came to Jesus and Jesus loved him and told him to sell everything he had and give to the poor and follow Jesus and this man left Jesus because he had great possessions. Rather than let go he chose to hang on and though the story does not say it my impression is that that man who would not let go lost everything.

The kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news.

Is Jesus calling you to leave home and family and work today in order to follow him? Maybe one or two of us but not most of us. In the gospels only a very few are invited to let go in this way. Yet I think all of us are in the habit of trying to carry a lot of things that keep us from opening the door to God's rule over our lives. Maybe it is your need to stay in control – a need that keeps you from taking chances with Jesus. Maybe it is simply busyness – that

always doing something that keeps you from having moments to listen to God or to a lonely neighbor. Maybe it is anxiety about money – having enough or not having any that so occupies your mind that God cannot break through.

Repent is Jesus word to you, and believe the good news.

Believe the good news. You do not belong to this rusting, dying world. You belong to God. And so does everyone else.

Our second lesson gets at this idea when Paul writes: “From now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.”

Paul is inviting us to belong to something else more than we belong to all of this and that something else is the love of God in Jesus Christ. What does it look like when someone is belonging to God? As you are letting go day by day and grasping hold of faith in Jesus we all are seeing what it looks like. The truth is I do not know what it looks like to live in the realm of God before I have done it – I only will know when God’s Spirit has filled my empty arms with the ones Jesus will give me to love.

The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news. Amen.