

***Thy Will Be Done***  
***Sermons for the Lenten Season***

**God's Will and Fulfillment**

Genesis 9:8-17; Mark 1:9-15

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My daughters disrespectfully call the music I grew up on and still enjoy “Geezer Rock.” I prefer to call it “Classic Rock.” As they were growing up, I taught my girls all about classic rock and roll. When a song came on the radio, I would quiz them. “Ok, who is that band?” I would ask. They became pretty knowledgeable about classic rock and roll. Clara, my youngest, had a default answer. If she didn’t know the name of the band, her default was to say, “Lynyrd Skynyrd,” which was usually a pretty good guess! I taught them, for example, that it is improper to turn off Lynyrd Skynyrd’s song *Freebird*. You know that, don’t you? If you arrive at your destination and *Freebird* is playing on the car radio, you don’t just turn it off as if it’s a regular old song. No, you wait in the parking lot or driveway and listen until it is finished. Then you turn off the radio. You who are about my age, I’m sure, know that.

You probably also know that Bob Dylan had a time in the late 70s when he embraced evangelical Christianity. He is Jewish but became a Christian and expressed his new found faith in his music. One of my favorites from this era is *Gotta Serve Somebody*. Anybody other than me remember this song? Oh, this is sad. It won a Grammy Award. I can see that I’m going to have to teach a class on classic rock and roll. We’ll probably have a few geezers show up! The song goes like this:

*You may be an ambassador to England or France*  
*You may like to gamble, you might like to dance*  
*You may be the heavyweight champion of the world*  
*You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls*

*But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes  
Indeed you're gonna have to serve somebody  
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord  
But you're gonna have to serve somebody*

Dylan goes through a long list of what you might be—a businessman, a doctor, a state trooper, head of a big TV network, a construction worker, or a preacher—but at the end of the day, no matter who you are, we've gotta serve somebody. It may be the devil. It may be the Lord. But we're all gonna serve somebody.

The song challenged people to ponder this question: “Who do I serve?” Do we purposefully, deliberately choose who we serve? Or do we go with the prevailing winds and serve whatever is the loudest and most pressing in our life? Who do you serve?

This first Sunday of Lent is asking us that same question. It's Jesus' first sermon, actually his first recorded words. Mark was the first gospel written, not Matthew. And according to Mark, these are the first words Jesus spoke. Are they important? One New Testament theologian writes, “The essence of what (Jesus) taught and what he did, and even who he is, is summarized in this one verse.” (H. Turlington, *BBC*, Mark, p. 272)

*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;  
repent, and believe in the gospel.*

It was a *kairos* moment. The Greek language has two words for time. One is *chronos*. It refers to the time of day or the time of year, chronological time. “What time is it?” would be a *chronos* question. The other word is *kairos*. That's the word Jesus uses here. It means the right time, the appropriate time, God's time. “You came at just the right time,” we might say.

“The time is fulfilled,” Jesus began. He wasn't looking at a watch or a calendar. He wasn't talking about chronological time; he was talking about God's time. Something was reaching its fulfillment. Something was culminating. It was just the right time for something.

What was it? What was so important that his first words identify it? What was so important that a theologian says that these words capture the essence of who Jesus was?

It was the Kingdom of God. The time is fulfilled, Jesus said, and the Kingdom of God is at hand.

There is no concept in the New Testament more important than the Kingdom of God. There is no concept in the teachings of Jesus more important than the Kingdom of God. And yet I dare say there is no concept more misunderstood than the Kingdom of God. I was teaching our youth once and asked them what the Kingdom of God is. They gave me several answers, and I put them all on the white board. We voted, and the number one answer was heaven. The Kingdom of God, they agreed, is heaven. So I drew a circle around the word heaven and then drew an X through it. The Kingdom of God is not heaven. Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is “in the midst of you.” It’s not something off into the future. It’s not something you cannot obtain now. “The kingdom of God is *at hand*,” he announced in this first sermon. Some argue that these words should be translated this way, “The kingdom of God *has come*.”

“It’s time,” Jesus was saying. “We’ve been anticipating this since the covenants in the book of Genesis, since God spread the rainbow across the sky. God’s time has come upon us. It is fulfilled. The Kingdom of God is at hand.”

So if it is not heaven, what is the Kingdom of God? Until this moment in Mark 1, it was believed that God’s favor was for one people. God’s reign was over one nation. God had a “chosen people.” Jesus proclaimed a new message, a message of the of a universal reign of God, where God’s favor was extended to all people. God’s reign was over all nations. God’s love was for EVERY. SINGLE. PERSON. That is the Kingdom of God.

Mark calls it “the good news of God.”

Psychologists often deal with people who grow up thinking they are the unfavored sibling. The sister got all the good looks. The brother

was smarter. Sister was more talented. Dad clearly liked him more than me. And honestly sometimes parents do favor one child over another. Perceived or real, rejection by one's parent or parents is a tough thing to deal with up here (head) and in here (heart). And sometimes people deal with rejection by acting out destructive behavior. If my dad doesn't care about me, why should I care? I think I'll escape all this with drugs, alcohol, or some other destructive behavior. Sometimes it takes a lot of work to unravel all of this and discover one's inherent worth. And when someone does that hard work and makes that discovery, it is profound. It is freeing. It is good news, of a biblical proportion, good news of one's fundamental worth as a human being.

See if you can hear this. In a deep place. In the place of ultimacy in your being. With his first words, Mark says, Jesus announced that God's favor is for EVERY. SINGLE. PERSON. Not just the pretty sisters. Not just the smart brothers. Everyone. The time is fulfilled, Jesus said. It is here. There are no unfavored siblings any more. I'm going to prove it. And he did.

The theologian Paul Tillich once said that salvation is our acceptance that we have been accepted by God. So simple! So profound!

So repent, Jesus said. Turn around. Believe the gospel, a word that means simply "good news." Reverse your direction and embrace this good news of God's love. Don't just blow with the prevailing winds. Don't succumb to what is loudest and most pressing. Choose to love and serve your Heavenly Parent. That was Jesus' first sermon. That is who Jesus was. That sentence captures the essence of what he taught, what he did, and who he was.

It is still good news. That we are accepted. Chosen. Favored. So who are you gonna serve? If we're all gonna serve somebody, who will that be? This first Sunday of Lent reminds us of fulfillment. It's not *coming*. It is here. Right here. Right now. The love of God for every single person permeates the air we breathe. So let us take our first step into Lent by saying, "Thy will be done."

Closing Prayer

In all our lives, Lord, this day and every day, Thy will be done.  
Amen.