

Year B 3<sup>rd</sup> Sun OT

Mark 1:14-20

## **There is Good News**

***There is good news today. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news that Christ brings us hope and peace. "The penalty of being human is having a split personality" (Barclay). We live as saint and sinner at the same time, in the same body, in the same world. Listen then to this story. It is not my story but I relate it to you in that way so that it might become your story as well as you receive it. (As told by William Willimon)***

I left the house about 6:30 that evening for my meeting. My wife wasn't particularly happy that I was going to be gone still another night. The kids needed baths and I had been gone every night this week. But as a Campus Pastor it was my calling to talk about issues of faith and life when invited, and I had been invited tonight.

But I was not sure about the audience. Every year the university required a certain number of educational programs be held by the sororities and fraternities to give them a certain air of respectability. And tonight I was going to the ATA Fraternity house to talk about "Character and College" I decided to let 'em have it. It wasn't that I had anything against fraternities. I had been a Greek in college. But as one, I knew how shiftless and irresponsible young men of that age can be, how much trouble they can make and get into – and I thought there would never be a better time to give them some good parental and pastoral advice.

I got to their fraternity house about 10 minutes early. It looked like the usual kind of place – front porch with two or three odd couches pushed back against the wall. Still snow sat on the arms and bikes were chained to rails. It didn't really look any different than the house I lived in 10 years ago – even though it was 10 years and 1000 miles away.

I rang the bell and the door opened. But it wasn't a college kid. Instead, a young boy opened the door – a boy of about 8 years of age. I thought "he's much too young to be hanging around a bunch like this" as he lead me into the main living room of the house. There were a few men there already – the president and others were setting up for their business meeting which was to follow this one. Introductions were made all around and more and more of the residents and members came in and found places to sit and lie and slouch around the room.

"As I began my remarks, I noticed that the little boy climbed into the lap of one of the brothers. Shortly, he fell asleep with his head on the shoulder of this college kid.

Well, I hammered them for the moral failures of their generation for about 30 minutes. When I finally finished my talk I asked if they had any questions or comments. Dead silence. So, I thanked them for the honor, and made my way out. But before I left the room, I heard the college kid say to the little boy, 'You go on and get ready for bed. I'll be up to tuck you in and read a story in a minute.'

When we stood just outside the door, the fraternity boy took a drag on his cigarette and thanked me for coming.

'Let me ask you,' I said, 'who was the kid there tonight?'"

'Oh, that's Darrell,' he said. 'The fraternity is part of the Big Brothers program. We met Darrell that way. His mom's on crack and having a tough time. Sometimes it gets so bad that she can't care for him. So we told Darrell to call us up when he needs us. We go over, pick him up and he stays with us until it's okay to go home. We take him to school; buy him his clothes, books, and stuff.'"

***There is in this gospel today, a word of good news, and it is repentance. Repentance means to turn around, to change course, to have a change of***

***mind. Repentance is not only being sorry for the consequences of sin but to hate sin itself. And at that moment I had to repent. I repented of my sin of condemnation before knowing the facts. I had rushed to judgment about these young men without knowing anything about them – an attribute for which I am heartily sorry.***

"That's amazing" I thought. "That's amazing!" I said. "I take back all that I said about you people being bad and irresponsible. I am sorry for accusing you and not taking you seriously."

"I tell you what's amazing," he said as he took another drag on his cigarette, "what's amazing is that God would pick a guy like me to do something this good for somebody else. "

***There is in this gospel today good news. There is the word believe. "Believe" says Jesus, "in the good news." To believe in the good news simply means to take Jesus at his word, to believe that God is the kind of God that Jesus has told us about, to believe that God so loved the world that he will make any sacrifice to bring us back to himself, to believe that what sounds too good to be true, really is true. Hope, Repent, believe, these are the good words for today. Amen***