

## The Gospel of Jesus Christ, 2nd Sunday in Epiphany

We hear the word Gospel spoken all the time, every Sunday, the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Today the opening of the Gospel of St. Mark was “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”. What and the heck does this word, Gospel, really mean? Why is this Gospel so important? There are many out there that just think the word means; book or sayings or something like that. The Gospel is the hinge of our faith that opens the Gate to the life eternal. So today I am going to try to answer the questions: What is the Gospel and how do I open the Gate for someone else?

I have been reminded several times over the past couple of weeks about the Gospel and my purpose to open the Gate for people. We are commanded to open the Gate for others in Mathew 28: 19- 20: "Go then to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age." So we have to go out and bring people to Jesus Christ. Basically, we have to go out and evangelize. I can hear many of you going: evangelize that's a scary thing, I can't do that, that's not me. St. Paul is clear in his writing that we are given different gifts and talents by God through the Holy Spirit some are appointed to be apostles, some prophets, some teachers, some the gifts of healings, or some help, and some do administrations. The Gifts of the Spirit do not depend on natural talents and aptitudes or developed skills, though God gave you those, too. A gift of the Spirit is something that God gives for the purpose of building up others in a life of faith. It is the experience of Christians over the years that the spirit usually harnesses one's talents in the service of the purpose for which the gifts were given. Yet sometimes, these spiritual gifts seem to work against a person's natural endowments

Evangelism is more than just telling someone about Jesus Christ, it is about showing someone Jesus Christ. Telling people about Jesus Christ is part of the equation, but the evangelizing that most of us can do, is showing people Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is just that, showing people Jesus Christ. The Celts, St Patrick, had a great model for reaching people: (1) “You first establish community with people, or bring them into the fellowship of your community of faith.” To simplify this, we become friends with people that are non believers. Wow, now that's not hard. I can do that. Then I start asking them to hang out with me and some of my Christian friends. Wow, that easy, I can do that. (2) “Within the fellowship, you engage in conversation, ministry, prayer, and worship” Lets break this down into simple terms. I invite some to a small group, or a church fun activity, or to church on Sunday. That's easy I can do that. Then fellow believers help engaging them in church life and become friends. That's simple, I can do that. And last (3) In time, as they discover that they now believe, you invite them commit. Ok, that a little harder, no worries that why we are a church, a community of believers, a group of believers with many different talents from the Holy Spirit. Someone will know the right time to ask, that why we are a fellowship of a community of believers.

This Celtic model of evangelizing draws people to personal growth in Jesus through two things: (1) You participated in common life, meals, work, learning, biblical recitation, prayers, and worship of the whole community, and (2) Through your small group, and the community's life, and perhaps as a soul friend, you observed and gained experience in ministry and witness to pre-Christian people. Now that is pretty simple. I can do that. I can show people Jesus Christ through the way I lead my everyday life. I don't have to get up and preach to anyone, I can be just me. We each have a job and a talent to use for Jesus, to help someone open the Gate.

So what is this hinge that opens the Gate to life eternal? In today's Gospel reading St. Mark 1:1, The first line is "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" This right here explains it all, but we must look to the Greek and Hebrew for the meanings of these words. Let's start with the original in Greek αρχη του ευαγγελιου ιησου χριστου υιου του θεου. Here is the translation from the Greek. In the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ the son of God. Gospel is not used in that sentence, Gospel is not Greek, but comes from the old English, God Spell meaning "good tidings" or "glad tidings". So Gospel is the English word translation for the Greek word ευαγγελιον (euangelion), which means good news. So what is this good news? So let's keep breaking down our sentence. The next word is Jesus, it comes from the Hebrew *Yēhōshūā* (Joshua) meaning "Yahweh delivers / rescues or Jehovah is salvation". Simply put, God saves. Back to our sentence "The beginning of the good news God saves. Ok, next word Christ, comes from the Greek word χριστός (Christos) meaning anointed one, which comes from the Hebrew word Messiah. Now let us put our sentence together "The beginning of the good news God saves anointed one, the son of God" or "The beginning of the good news God saves by the anointed one, the son of God"

Up to this point as a Jew you did not go to heaven and your sins were atoned by animal sacrifice at the temple. Here is the key point, they were not forgiven. Remember in Luke 16:19-31 those who were found to be up right by God were placed in Abraham's bosom and there was a great chasm between them and hell. That's why Jesus descended into hell for three days, so he could preach the good news to them. The only way to heaven is through acceptance of Jesus Christ.

So back to our sentence, "The beginning of the good news God saves by the anointed one, the son of God". Here the question, God saves you from what? Simple, hell. This is the good news, this is the Gospel, and this is the hinge of our faith that opens the Gate to the life eternal. There are only two choices we have in this world, do we want to go to heaven or hell. This is harsh, I know. But contrary to popular belief there is only one way into to heaven and that is through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. There is no other way. Want to hear the sadist things, the majority of people believe they are going to heaven, because basically they are a good person. When they get in front of God they are going to say, here is a list of all the good things I have done, therefore I should be allowed into heaven. Everybody always wants to see all the positives in their life, not the negatives. Hate to be the one to break the bad news to you, but that is not how God is going to judge us. If you have not accepted Christ then God will judge each

one of us not arbitrarily but by a common standard, the law, the Ten Commandments. If you commit a crime here on earth, the judge could care less the all good things you have done in your life, he is going to judge you on the law you broke. Let me break this down for you, all the good you did, means squat.

We are not going to go through all the Ten Commandments, but I have one simple question for you, have you ever told a lie? The answer for all of us, is yes. You're guilty, plain and simple. God only sees in black and white, there is no grey area. Here is the sad fact, about God. None of us have ever been able to keep his laws; therefore none of us can gain admission in to heaven on our own merits. Only Jesus who was perfect, can get into heaven on his own merits, therefore we need Jesus. No matter what you have done, God wants you. That's why he sent his only son to die on a cross. He takes all of your sins and pays the price for them, so you can enter into heaven. Jesus came to earth to take his humanity to heaven. Jesus is the bridge for us to get into heaven. Here is how Jesus is a bridge for us. When He died on the cross for our sins, one of his hands was touching God's hand and His other hand was touching your hand. He is our connection to God.

Let's look at the next part of the first sentence, "As it is written in the prophets" then comes the prophecy, "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. This part is critical for the doubters of Jesus Christ as God. That is why the Gospel and Epistle writers bring them up, to prove that Jesus is the Messiah. Scholars argue on the number of Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, but there are around three hundred plus. Simple little fact for you, he fulfilled them all.

Someone did all the math and figured out that the probability of just eight prophecies being fulfilled is one chance in one hundred million billion. That number is millions of times greater than the total number of people who have ever walked the earth. Here is another way to look at it. If you took this number in silver dollars, they would cover the State of Texas, two feet deep. If you marked one silver dollar among them and then had a blind folded person wonder the whole state and bend down and pick up one coin, that would be the odds that he choose the one that had been mark. What's the probability of three hundred being fulfilled? That can only lead to one conclusion; Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God.

Let's unpack the last part of this, the Baptism of Jesus. "I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in the Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." There are two key points going on here, which we need to break down. First, John baptized the multitude in the baptism of repentance. This type of baptism required sinners to repent of their sins, then do good works to prove their repentance. This baptism of repentance

was used as a beginning point and made the path straight toward Jesus Christ's baptism of redemption which would come later. You get that, you were not saved by John's baptism, only baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and the acceptance of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior can save you. John's baptism was reminding them that they were all sinners and to turn back to the Lord.

Second this was the beginning of Jesus ministry, a public affirmation that he was the Messiah and confirmed by heaven above. Up to this point Jesus was living as a man, learning humanity. In last week's Gospel reading, Jesus was found in the temple teaching the scholars of the day, after being missing from His parents. I believe Jesus did this to remind his own parents, I am the son of God, because he was living fully as a man. It was easy to forget. Jesus was baptized in public to announce Himself as God's Son, and to announce the beginning of His ministry with the Holy Spirit's power. This was the third person of the Trinity, descending upon him in the form of a dove. The dove, among the Jews, was the symbol of purity of heart, harmlessness, and gentleness. The form chosen here was no doubt an emblem of the innocence, meekness, and tenderness of the Savior. The gift of the Holy Spirit, in this manner, was the public praise of Jesus and a sign of his being set apart as the Messiah. Jesus did not "need" the Holy Spirit. However, to set an example for us, Jesus emptied Himself, you can find this in Philippians 2:7, and relied upon the Holy Spirit's power. Is this not how we are suppose to live our lives?

We need to rely on the Holy Spirit. We have been given gifts and talents by the Holy Spirit to show people Jesus Christ. We are commanded to "Go then to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age." The Gospel is us going out and spreading the good news that Jesus died for us, so we could be in a relationship with God and go to heaven. The good news is simple, accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, it is this faith, the hinge, that opens the Gate to life eternal, Evangelism we learned today is easy, we need to show people to Jesus Christ who is the Gate. Show people to Jesus by showing them how we live our lives as a community of Christian believers. Go spread the Gospel.