

What do you do when you have news to share? Maybe it's good news, maybe it's bad news, maybe it's surprising or interesting news. It's something that maybe someone else hasn't heard about, but you know, and you have to share it with them.

There's a lot of ways to do that. You can share it with them in someone in conversation, you can write an email, you could send a text message or a phone call. We talked about it in the children's message, reading the newspaper or other ways of communicating. When there's something that you know that someone else needs to know, we have to tell them in some way. We have to share that news with them.

What are times in your life where you have had news to share? How did you communicate it with someone else? What was the first thing you did? What spread the news that you had to other people in your life, and how did they begin to spread it to others that perhaps that your life was going to be different?

The very first verse of the Gospel of Mark is like that news. It's like that text message or phone call or a letter that's written. It's a signal to others that something has happened, and it helps provide a little bit of context about what's coming ahead.

The first message that you share when there's news to share in your life isn't all that there is to be said. However, it may be the most important or hold the most critical information. You want to share it first, before you go on to say more. Perhaps you've been on the phone call, for example, where someone is talking so fast, and when they answered the phone, and then all of a sudden you stop and say, "Wait a minute. I don't know what you're talking about. What is it that has happened?"

Have you ever been in a conversation like that? Maybe you've been the one sharing the story, or maybe you've been the one that has been receiving it. This news is what happens in the Gospel of Mark. The very first verse, the beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's son. This is the essence of this entire book. This is what's most important. This is the main thing. And it sets the stage for our journey through the season of Lent. We'll be looking at the entire Gospel According to Mark, looking at it from the very first verses here until the very end, helping us to prepare from this resurrection of Jesus at Easter through this lens, through this writer, through these words. And it begins with these words, "The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's son."

This verse begins to introduce four main themes. That theologian, Mitzi Minor, tells us are four of the major themes that we'll see in this book over the days ahead. They are simple ones, the main ones of our faith, as you might imagine, the themes of God, Jesus, the Kingdom of God, and followers of Jesus. Of course, those that were there when Jesus walked among us, and those of us here today.

And today, I want to take a closer look at each one of these themes to help set the stage for the weeks ahead, as we delve deeper into the Gospel of Mark. We begin with God, and the God who appears as the source of the story that unfolds in Mark's Gospel is the God for life ... is the God of life for whom the impossible is possible. God has dramatically entered the world in Jesus Christ, and acted decisively to bring about the hope of God's people, brought God's Kingdom here, closer to who they are, and offers an alternative to living in the way that we might otherwise live.

God's power in this book does not rely on force. It is not dominating or manipulative or violent. The power of God as described in Mark rests in the power of life.

Jesus, of course, is one of the main themes of the Gospel. The Book of Mark, along with Matthew and Luke and John tell Jesus' story. And Jesus is the beloved son of God, the Messiah anointed with the Spirit of God to proclaim that God's Kingdom is here. God's Kingdom is coming on earth, and inviting us to live as part of God's Kingdom, and among God's people.

As Mark tells the story of Jesus, Jesus does not look forward to the suffering that he knows is coming. He asked God to have him pass him by, he screams a sense of abandonment from the cross, and yet the threats, the suffering, perhaps even fear, could not turn him back from his faithful purpose, free living in God's Kingdom.

In this Gospel, we see that Jesus chose his followers, that they can live within God's kingdom, and find life even if they face the threats and violence of the powers of those that oppose God. Jesus invites his followers, invites us today, to see the life that was possible for them because of God.

The Kingdom of God is the third major theme in the Gospel of Mark. In God's Kingdom, there are no structures of subordination. People aren't oppressed. All are welcome. All are forgiven. And we're also all servants of one another called to serve our neighbor. And the claim at the end of Mark's Gospel, that Jesus was resurrected, dramatically confirms Jesus' announcement at the very beginning, that the Kingdom of God is here, the Kingdom of God is among us. Change your hearts and lives and trust in this good news.

And then, finally, the followers of Jesus, those that would have heard these words originally, and us today, followers of Jesus in Mark are called to see that Jesus is resurrected, that the Kingdom of God has come close to us, and that our freedom from slavery to sin and death is here. The followers of Jesus are called to share their bread, to practice the inclusive ... the radical inclusivity of God's Kingdom to serve one another, to cast out evil, to pray for one another, to heal, and to forgive. Of course, the followers of Jesus in this Gospel, and today, are also called to take up the cross to accept the risks of bearing witness to all nations that they can live in God's Kingdom. And the call is hardly an easy one.

The call of our Christian life doesn't always promise an easy journey, and yet it does promise that God walks with us. Some of those who encounter Jesus seemed to see clearly, and join themselves fully to God's Kingdom, and others struggle. Even those 12 that Jesus called specifically to follow after him, to share his message with others, they struggle, and perhaps we struggle as well today from time to time. The challenge that Jesus presents in the Gospel of Mark is real.

These four themes of God, Jesus, the Kingdom of God, and followers of Jesus, they're essential to our understanding of faith, and throughout Mark the writer gives us clues about the essence of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's son.

It's important to know the main thing when you have news to share. And Mark begins here with that, the most important news. And it's also helpful to know a framework for reading the story of Jesus in Mark. And one of those ways about thinking about this gospel is that it's something to know, but that

knowledge about Jesus, about God's love, isn't all that there is, that knowledge leads to action. Knowing isn't all there is. Acting in God's Kingdom, and sharing God's love, is at the stake here.

And it's the same thing in our lives today. Knowledge leads to action in a lot of different ways. Let me show you an example. I love fireworks. The 4th of July is a fantastic time. And when I was little, I was ... I remember that we'd save up money and we'd go ... I'd go to the store and be able to buy fireworks. And some of them, when you brought them home, and you shot them off, well, they were just a little bit disappointing. They literally did not give you very much bang for the buck. And then one year, I realized, "Hey, instead of kind of guessing every year, why don't I write down the ones that I know, and that are good, and then make sure and get them?" Now, some were easy to remember, but others were a little bit unusual. And so I wrote down their names, and the next year I was able to go back. And that knowledge led to action.

Of course, that's true in other circumstances in our life as well. Imagine a restaurant that you enjoy. Imagine maybe the place that you eat most often. Now, there are often two types of people when it comes to restaurants. One type of person likes to go and try everything on the menu, and see what the flavors are, and how they're different, and how they're similar. And some people do not at all want to try everything on the menu. They want to choose the one thing that they know, and just order the usual every time. It doesn't matter where you are on the side of that, you begin to remember. And if it's the one thing that you always order, that knowledge leads to action. And if you're the person that likes to try everything on the menu, certainly there are things that you would remember are better than others. And if you come to circle around again to the same thing, you'll know which one you like and which ones you don't. Knowledge leads to action.

The same is true in the Gospel of Mark. It's good to know more about this book, the themes of God, and Jesus, about the Kingdom of God, about followers of Jesus. And we'll be talking more about them in the weeks ahead. And, of course, the main thing here at the beginning ... the beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's son, the good news of Jesus Christ, God's son.

Of course, knowing this good news about God's love shown for us in Jesus Christ is not the end of the story. That knowledge, as well, calls us into action.

Theologians remind us that Christianity did not begin with the New Book. Its scriptures were that of the Jewish people in the very early years. Christianity began with a new message found in Jesus Christ, and shared across the ancient Near East. These sayings of Jesus, and the stories about him, had circulate by word of mouth for years before Mark was written down. And these stories don't depend on the writing to be remembered.

This good news that we know about Jesus Christ is a simple message of salvation, the chance to be made right with God, the chance to live in community with our neighbors, all because of God's love shown for us in the life and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This message, people can take anywhere in the world.

The Gospel of Mark is a reminder that God's promise of salvation, that God would save God's people is fulfilled in the public ministry, Jesus' death on the Cross and in his resurrection. These are the ways in which God's love comes to us, and these are the ways in which God's love begins to lead us into action.

Because knowing about these things is not enough. We respond to God's love and faith by loving God and our neighbor. We have the opportunity because God has first loved us that we might share God's love with all that we meet, especially those who don't yet know. We have the chance to act on this message of salvation every day of our life by the way that we choose to treat one another, by the words that we use in conversation with our friends, with our family, and with those people that we may not like so much, dare I say, our enemies.

This knowledge of God's love, this knowledge of his son, Jesus Christ, leads us into action in ways that are inclusive, ways that are serving, ways that humble ourselves and ask that God's will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven, not our own will be done. Knowledge leads to action, and God invites us to live as a part of God's Kingdom.

The good news is Jesus Christ, God's son, who fulfills the promise of salvation. And with that good news, we are called to act in ways that are loving, that see our friends, and our neighbors, and our enemies, as all people worthy and included in God's love and forgiveness.

So where is God leading you to action? What knowledge do you have about Jesus, about your faith, about family members, about friends, and what you do for a living? Where is it in your life where knowledge leads to action?

And our invitation from the Gospel of Mark is that we just don't know about it, that indeed we do take action, that indeed we do look to share this good news about Jesus Christ, God's love shown in him, that we might share it with the world. God offers us strength for the journey. God shares the news at the very beginning, and invites us to take action in our lives every day.

Will you pray with me?

Oh, God, we give You thanks for the knowledge of Your son, Jesus Christ, for his life, and death, and resurrection, the chance that we have to follow You. And we ask, not only that we might know You, but that we might act in the ways that You invite us to act, loving our neighbors, serving others, working for reconciliation, and justice, and peace. Because sometimes the way ahead seems overwhelming, and so we ask for Your strength, we ask for Your sustenance, and for Your guidance. Help us to take knowledge of You, and put it into action.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.