

Why change?!

Now after John was arrested, 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." Mark 1:15

The focus of this message is taken from the latter part of Mark 1:15: *'and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news'*. The title of the message is 'WHY CHANGE'.

- 1) In today's gospel Jesus driven into the wilderness by the spirit just after his baptism for forty days. Immediately afterwards we are told that he begins his ministry by preaching the message of repentance. We have heard this same message before. His cousin John who was arrested, preached the same thing, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near'; a sermon that he himself preached over and over and over again. One would think that with Jesus coming on the scene as God's 'new face' on the block, that he would have come with something new to say. Something like, 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only son... so here I am' would have been more expected but almost without skipping a beat, Jesus picks up right where John leaves off. As if only to say, 'the messenger may change but the message remains the same'.
- 2) In fact, God's message has not changed since time-immemorial; from the prophets to the kings to the judges and the patriarchs there has been one theme – 'God is near, make a change'. And this transition in messenger only confirms the continuity of God's salvific plan for the world.
- 3) Let us remember the children of Israel, who were in the wilderness for 40 years for a journey that should have only taken 40 days. They had fled Egypt and were on their way to the promised land but for some reason, could not get there fast enough. Obviously, there was a problem. Their GPS was off. Or maybe there was another problem that they just hadn't figured out yet. I suspect that the problem had something to do with PROXIMITY: not proximity as it relates to the promised land. Let's face it, the Promised land didn't move. It was right there, it was near. Well if the problem is not proximity to the promised land could it be that it was proximity to the PROMISER (God)? It's not as important to know how close you are to your destiny in as much as it is important to know how close you are to the one who will guide you there; to reference what Isaiah says, 'These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.' Isaiah 29:13. The kingdom of God maybe near, but where are you and more so, where are you? What's more, where is your heart in proximity to God?
- 4) Now coming back to the Jesus' message on repentance I thought I would focus on that word a bit. The word 'repentance' is usually associated with 'doom and gloom'. Growing up back home whenever you heard preachers begin to talk about 'repentance' you would start shaking in your boots because you knew that 'fire and brimstone' wasn't too far away. And

so in the Bahamas and quite possible globally the word itself has gotten a bad rap and carries with it some negative connotations. So instead of the word 'repentance' I will use the word CHANGE. Now there is so much that can be said about change. There are varying degrees of change. There's big, small, good and bad change. But here I will speak specifically about positive change as it relates to proximity to destiny, patterns of behavior and perspectives in life.

- 5) In order to bear positive change, you must have a better purpose; a more compelling reason for change. If your reason to change to avoid punishment then it's not going to stick. I cannot tell you the amount of times I have started and quit the gym. And the reason for this is that I've always joined gyms or started exercising because I've wanted to lose weight, which in itself has a very negative connotation attached to it, doesn't it?, which is different from saying, 'I want to join the gym because I want to be more healthy'. Living a healthier life is more positive and compelling a reason. And there must be something more compelling. There must be some reason that takes you closer to your intended outcome, that drives your behavior, some reason that gives you more focus and energy. So, your WHY must be compelling enough to bring about lasting change. People change all the time. I would say everyone changes. But you will find more lasting change among those that do it for their health, family, wealth, relationships. These are the ones that are compelled to change because they realize that they want better... health, family, wealth and relationships.
- 6) When you know your why, it makes process of change more bearable, because change is hard. I don't wish to tell you what to change, because I don't know you... and I do hope that you return the favor... and I'm not going to tell you how to change. All I want for you is to know your WHY and POSSESS it. It was Nietzsche who said, "He who has a WHY can bear any HOW". You must possess your WHY
- 7) And so, we must constantly ask ourselves the question, 'WHY is God constantly asking me to embrace change for the better?' Why change? Because you are almost there (the kingdom of God is near). Why change? Because there is better in store (who wouldn't want to live in a kingdom?). And if you knew BETTER was nearby, wouldn't you want to get there FASTER? These are all compelling reasons that answer the question God is asking of us.
- 8) And if your future destiny isn't a compelling enough reason. Then, what is? There may be some of you who say, 'thinking about a better place is too materialistic or too much trouble or "I'm too old for this, change is for young people"' (some people care to be in a better place). So a more compelling 'why' maybe to make others' lives better (there are some that don't care enough about others). Or if that's not a compelling enough reason some might change to make the world better (and even then there are some that don't care). Well, if a better place or a better friend or a better world is not a compelling enough reason, then what is? So if you won't do it for a better future. What about a better present?

- 9) How do you feel now? With all the changes that surround us and the chaotic things that come our way, what is it that keeps all that chaos from sending you crazy? How do you feel now? Some of you may say, 'I feel lost, disconnected, out of place, anxious, afraid, restless.' What if I told you that we could change that now? Augustine says, 'Our hearts are restless, until we find our rest in thee'. Restless... so many of us feel this way. Could it be that we are being challenged today to find our center? To be centered means to rest – to be balanced, at peace, connected to God. To be centered is to be right where you need to be. It is to have certainty that you are in the right place (present with God). It is saying, 'God I don't care about how far I am from my destination, in as much as how far I am from you.' I wonder how long it would have taken the children of Israel to get to the promised land had they been more centered. Being centered is the greatest reason you can possess to have lasting positive change. Maybe this is why God's message on 'change' has remained the same... because he wants us to be centered, in place where he is. Find your center today as I find mine. We have forty days in this Lenten season to find it. Let us pray it doesn't take forty years.

God bless you.