

February 18, 2024 (Lent 1 B)

Mark 1:14-15

“God Has Sounded the ALARM!”

We’re all taught at a very young age, that when a **fire alarm** sounds – we’re supposed to drop everything, NOT panic, but quickly / safely / efficiently get out of the building. But it seems like; (in real life – apart from fire drills at school maybe) ***this almost never happens***. If an alarm sounds and people can *see* smoke and/or flames – PANIC!!! Then *people scream*. People clutch whatever valuables they can find in a frenzy. They look for family members; they look for pets. They may pack as much stuff into whatever they can find and run around frantically looking for a safe way out.

But – if an alarm sounds when everything *seems* normal – not much tends to happen. I remember being in a Seminary classroom when the fire alarm sounded. *No one did a thing!* We were in the middle of a big exam, and we just kept plugging along. Only the professor moved; he stuck his head out of the door to see if there were any flames or frantic people running around – *nothing* – so he said, “Just ignore it.” Eventually it stopped.

That’s what people do – they look around to see if anyone is reacting to it. If someone comes along and says – *“Come on! Let’s get out of the building!”* Then people might grudgingly make their way to the exit, assuming it’s not too big of an intrusion on what they’re doing. We assume there’s no real emergency unless we **SEE it**. People jump to the conclusion that it’s just a test, or there’s a problem with the system, or someone pulled the alarm, or whatever. Typically the alarm is ignored unless we SEE the smoke or flames.

There’s a real spiritual parallel here because, in the 2nd part of our Gospel Lesson, Jesus ***sounds the ALARM!*** And God urges us to TAKE IT SERIOUSLY! But, you can guess how people react to it. In fact, you can see quite clearly that it’s not having the impact it’s supposed to. It’s not God’s fault – ***He’s the One sounding the alarm!*** **Mark 1:14-15** (NIV) is one of those places we can hear it clearly. **14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”**

MARK is the shortest of the 4 Gospels. Today’s lesson (Mark 1:12-15) will help you understand why. In the first paragraph (verses 12-13) we’re told Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. In the second paragraph (verses 14-15) we’re told Jesus went out after John the Baptist was put in prison and began sounding the Alarm – ***Repent and believe the good news!*** The Gospel writer MARK gets right to the point and moves on. The other Gospels give us more information about 3 specific temptations and how Jesus addressed them with words from Scripture. We don’t know exactly how many temptations Jesus was pounded with and we can only imagine how grueling it was – but Mark just says pointedly: *“Jesus went out to the wilderness. With the wild animals. 40 days. Tempted by the devil. Attended by angels. OK – next item.*

It’s like he’s got **SO** much information that he just lists things point form so he can get ahead to where the sinless Lamb of God was slaughtered for our sins – opening the Kingdom to us fallen people – then rising from the dead in victory. You could call Mark’s Gospel the **Lenten Gospel / Passion Gospel** because nearly ½ of it has to do with the events of Holy Week culminating in the Resurrection.

In the 2 verses of our text, Jesus’ exact words are recorded here to nail home the point clearly: ***God has sounded the ALARM! The time has come.*** Literally, “the time of fulfillment is at hand”. Thousands of years of prophecy have come to pass as the King of kings began His work redemption. His call went out: ***“Repent and believe the good news.”***

Lots of people back then just wanted to see the miracles. Many thought they had nothing to repent of and didn’t understand what the good news was all about. So – the ALARM of Jesus’ words was ignored by quite a few people. But some believed Him and took Him very seriously. His disciples left everything to come and follow Him. But they were also very confused about things. They had the whole concept of God’s Kingdom all mixed up with worldly rule and power. It wasn’t until His work was complete and all the dust settled that the Holy Spirit *opened their hearts*, and they realized that God’s Kingdom is about repentance and faith / the righteousness of Christ / atonement in His blood and eternal life.

Then in the Spirit’s power they took off across the globe sounding God’s ALARM – ***Repent and believe the Good News of Jesus!*** That alarm has saved many souls from the destruction of sin

and banishment to hell. Thankfully, we've heard it, and it's touched our hearts. But, what are **we** supposed to *do* when we hear it? It's been clanging for 2000 years! From our perspective, life just keeps trudging on day after day and year after year. We can easily lose the sense of urgency and slip into sinful complacency. Jesus' words rattle us and WAKE us up – it's time to REPENT and BELIEVE and run and cling to Him – who keeps us safe in His Kingdom.

Do you remember what GOD'S KINGDOM is? Simply put, it's *where He rules*. Jesus said it's not a physical or earthly thing – it's a SPIRITUAL thing. **“Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.’”** (Luke 17:20-21). God rules in the hearts of believers and in the glory of heaven.

Since it's a spiritual reality and not some earthly thing, God's ALARM is aimed at our hearts with a sense of *spiritual* urgency. His ALARM is about rescuing people from the spiritually burning house of this unbelieving world and bringing them into His Kingdom. His Kingdom comes when His Gospel News is proclaimed to the world and souls repent and believe the message. When the smoke and flames of Judgement Day are here (and it becomes a *physical* reality all of a sudden), it'll be too late to heed this alarm. Jesus is the ESCAPE hatch from a doomed world. He holds His hand out and says **“Repent! - Drop sinful ways, come to me, and live!”** His call goes out to the world: REPENT AND COME TO ME! I WILL SAVE YOU – NOW!! Time is running out.

For those of us who **have** been brought to faith in Christ through a repentant heart and trust him as our Savior – we're now called to be His instruments in sounding this **spiritual alarm** out to the world. We may not look any different from anyone else in a physical sense – but God sees the spiritual reality that we have been RESCUED by Jesus and crossed over from death to life. We are **safe and secure** in his Arms and nothing can rip Him away from us. We're **safe and secure** even through turmoil / pain / heartache / loss / disease / and death. When our souls are safe – we are safe. The Kingdom is ours. That's a reality we can't see and can't always feel – but it's more solid than the ground below us because of God's Word to us.

Repentance and faith is what Jesus wants; the saving of souls for eternal life. That's why He's been **sounding the alarm for 2000 years**. He'll keep it ringing out until time is up. I hope you know what you're supposed to do. We join the disciples in sending this ALARM out to others. When an alarm sounds in a public building and people ignore it or look around to see how people are reacting – sometimes just ONE person who stands up and says, *“Come on people – this is serious! Let's get out of the building!”* can make all the difference.

I know it can be demoralizing when your friends, neighbors, family members, community – doesn't want to hear about God and just goes on ignoring His ALARM. Maybe they look around and it doesn't seem like anyone else is too concerned about God. They tell themselves they have nothing to worry about and that they're decent people and decent people shouldn't have anything to worry about. They want assurance things are fine as they are. They like to hear, *“You're a good person; we're going to be OK – just go about life as normal.”* Churches that tell people to comfortably remain where they are and work on the things they *want* to do are certainly popular – but they're not helping people escape the burning building of this world through Jesus – *the only exit*. Believers that keep their mouths closed at family gatherings or among neighbours and friends aren't helping people escape the flames.

God puts His people out in the world with His Word to SOUND THE ALARM. But, we haven't been very effective **smoke detectors** (*if you will*), have we? Go to Jesus in repentance. He'll receive you, forgive you, and the **Gospel** will be the new battery within you that will give you the power to speak up and warn the people around you. You can be that ONE person that makes all the difference. When the topic of God comes up, YOU could say: *“This is serious – we NEED Jesus to enter heaven – **repent and believe that Jesus is your Savior who died to remove all your guilt. I want you to be in heaven with me someday, and Jesus is the ONLY way there. Please come and check it out!**”* We can set an example by our priorities and we can keep on encouraging people and that's what God wants (and expects) us to do – yes, it's a spiritual alarm right now, but once that trumpet blows it'll be too late and this world will physically be set on fire. Now is the time, my friends, REPENT and BELIEVE the Good News, and we'll truly be **safe** – now and forever.