

125th Anniversary Eucharist
The Feast of St. Mark (transferred)
September 30, 2018
The Rev. Ian Burch
St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Happy birthday, St. Mark's! You're looking fresh-faced for 125 years old. We have made it to this happy occasion lifted by countless generous and faithful generations who have worshipped God in this space; cared and loved one another in the space; launched campaigns of charity, mercy, and justice from this space; and broke bread in this space. It has been made holy by God, and it has been made holy by a century and a quarter of faithful witness to the truth of the Gospel: that our neighbors are as precious as ourselves and that our God is a God of unlimited and radical love. The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Happy birthday.

I remember sitting three years ago on the sofa in our apartment in Chicago, halfheartedly scrolling through the database of Rector openings one evening when I noticed a new parish profile. There was a church in Milwaukee looking for a priest. It was of modest size, had a gorgeous sanctuary, seemed to have wise and faithful members, and, as far as I could tell, unlimited potential for growth and renewal. After reading the profile, I showed it to Travis and asked what he thought. We agreed it seemed like a great place, and so I applied. I am so grateful to God that I did and that we seemed to hit it off.

And here I am, preaching the Gospel on this incredibly special day in this history of this church, just as a priest has preached the Gospel every Sunday for 125 years. (And every single sermon was a winner, I'm sure.) In the Gospel of Mark this morning, Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist. The heavens open up, and we get our first dramatic indication that this Jesus is not a regular teacher and prophet. The Gospel shows us that there is something special about this man from Galilee and that we should immediately pay attention. After hearing the voice of God and seeing a glimpse of the Spirit, Jesus is chased into the wilderness to wrestle, learn, and reflect before returning to the people and declaring that NOW is that time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near.

This cycle of wilderness wandering and then energetic Divine presence strikes me as the story of our church. There have been years far away, wrestling and being lost. And then there have been years when the time has been ripe for public ministry; times when we declare that the kingdom of God is NOW and that we have work to do. Many of you have been members long enough to remember times wandering in the wilderness--worrying about the future, about finances, about empty pews. Any organization as old as we are has weathered numerous cycles of wilderness then of vibrant mission. And, I believe absolutely that we are in a moment of vibrant mission today. This is the day on which we re-launch our great commission, on which we tell the world that we have met Jesus and we are here to tell you all about it. Today is a day that we recommit

to being a church for the glory of God. Our anniversary is only partly about the past; it is substantially about the now and about the future of St. Mark's.

St. Mark's isn't really ours. It was handed into our care by our ancestors, and today we hand it to Liza, Audrey, and Wynn who are being baptized this morning. We say that they are members of the Body of Christ and inheritors of the rights and responsibilities of membership in the reign of God. From today forward, they are the heirs of all the work, love, grace, and faith of this place. We give the church into their tiny and someday capable hands.

Welcome to the family of Christ young ones, and welcome to St. Mark's.

There are days to talk about the shadows that lurk in our hearts, to shine a little light on the grisly reality of the human condition. There are days to fast and repent in the wilderness. Not today. Today, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Today is to celebrate 125 years of faithful witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the world and to begin planning our next 125-year mission. And that mission, of course, belongs to these three little ones.

St. Mark's, I charge you to go into this world filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and firm in the promises of Jesus to preach that the kingdom of God is here and now. I ask you to tell your friends and neighbors about the work that God has done in this place for 125 years and about the promise of a bright future for St. Mark's. I remind you of your own baptisms and of the power that flows from being children of God. And I invite you to give glory to God in prayer and song for every good thing that has happened and that will happen in this wonderful, magnificent, and holy space. Amen.