

Sermon – Mark 1:14-20
David R. Lyle
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“The Full-Time Kingdom”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace this day in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. The amount of board games we own is in direct proportion to the length of the pandemic. Our most recent acquisition is the game *5 Second Rule*, in both regular and junior editions. It’s simple enough. One player reads a category card, say, “Museums” or “Honeymoon Destinations,” and another player needs to give three correct answers. Simple enough, except for the challenge for which the game is named. You only have five seconds to answer. It turns out that this is enough time for our children to think of me, but not enough time to think of anyone else, when the category is “Famous Bald People.” The game comes with a not-at-all-annoying buzzer that goes off nearly after it is started. You might wish for more time, but full time is reached almost immediately.
2. Mark’s Gospel has the buzzer sounding this morning right after the game begins, as it were. Not only does Mark bypass any telling of the Nativity; he tells the story in such a way that Jesus is at the end as soon as he gets started. Jesus doesn’t take time to warm up the crowd or go over the syllabus. He simply, and with great finality, declares: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near.” Time’s fullness, however, is not measured by a timer. It is rather a sign of the Kingdom itself, the fullness of God’s willing and working that can no longer be contained. Instead, it bursts forth like steam from a kettle or popping corn pushing off its lid. One might wonder if Jesus has come because the time is fulfilled, or if the time is fulfilled because

Jesus has come, but it's a distinction without a difference. The presence of Jesus inaugurates the reign of God wherever he goes; Christ *is* the fullness of God. While the poet A. R. Ammons did not have Christ in mind, I can't help but see him in these lines pondering the world: "When you consider the radiance, that it does not withhold / itself but pours its abundance without selection into every / nook and cranny not overhung or hidden." The difference, I suppose, is that Christ brings the Kingdom's fullness even into hidden, overhung places. When the time is fulfilled, the Christ comes to fill all in all, withholding nothing.

3. This inaugural address of Jesus is a sweeping proclamation, universal in scope and contingent upon nothing but itself, the Word who speaks these words. Time has reached its fullness and the Kingdom has come to you! In grace, with fullness, God comes to us in Christ. But if the Kingdom comes toward us in grace, it comes to those whose lives are moving in the wrong direction, for whom time is now up. Repent, Jesus commands, and believe the good news. We, every last one of us, in our own peculiar but equally sinful way, have been living life in the wrong direction. We've created a bad-news world. Will we believe now the good news, the hopeful whisper of a God who shows up not to punish but to put back together, as Jesus pushes out from within us all that is not of God so that God may fill us? Or will we cling to the old ways?
4. If Jesus would have left well enough alone, we'd have a nook or cranny in which to hide. "We" is a wonderful word, isn't it? So, too, our plural "you." As long as it's "we" or "y'all" we might yet wriggle out of his net. But as Jesus moves from lecture to lab, the universal becomes terribly particular. The plural collapses into the singular. Jesus goes down to Galilee's shore. He finds everyday people engaged in quotidian tasks. Mending nets. Bending new boards to repair their boats. Discussing with their father where the fish might be tomorrow. "Follow me" is not an invitation to people in general. It is

a command of grace spoken by Jesus, the incarnate God, as he looks with knowing love into the eyes of Andrew and Simon, James and John. I wonder if they looked at Jesus with hesitation or fear; if they pondered the hard comfort of life up to that moment – the familiar unknowns of the sea, the varied vicissitudes of their vocation – and weighed these against the total uncertainty of following a man they'd never met into truly uncharted waters. Perhaps. Or perhaps they looked back into Christ's eyes and saw a fullness upon which they could depend, a love that could comprehend their entire life, a God who would do everything for them. Perhaps they took one look and they knew. Perhaps, right there in the middle of what started out as just another day at the office, they saw their old life come to an end and a new life beginning. A life so filled by Jesus that they no longer had to worry about catching enough for themselves, but could now participate joyfully in the work of catching others in the loving embrace of Kingdom nets.

5. While these two sets of brothers are caught up by Christ at the beginning of his ministry, they also find themselves at the end of the story right away. Jesus is not, after all, inviting them to alter their life as if discipleship is a hobby or something to fit in over the weekend. Here, in this encounter, they meet their end. As Bonhoeffer writes, we must abandon all earthly attachments: "It is that dying of the old [person] which is the result of [their] encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death – we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a [person], he bids [them] come and die." In that moment, as the crucified and risen Christ comes into our work, our world, and speaks to us – *Repent! Believe! Follow!* – we find our old lives brought to an end. We – which is to say you and I – are united with the death of Christ and brought to newness of life by the power of the Spirit. Not a life altered or amended, but *new*.

6. If, however, we must answer for ourselves in the singular, we need not be solitary. Andrew and Simon have one another, as do James and John, when Jesus comes to them. Who has stood next to you, helping you orient your life to the Christ who comes to you? I've been thinking a lot about Glen over the last few days, the friend whose death was announced at the beginning of worship. I haven't seen Glen in years, but he came into my life in a powerful way at an important time. He was one of the program directors when I first worked as a Lutheran Bible camp counselor. I met Glen sometime after his accident, the horrible car accident that robbed him of the use of his legs and confined his body, but not his spirit, to a wheelchair. Glen lived an undaunted, exuberant life, roaming the camp with an impish gleam in his eye that made you realize that the life of faith is not meant to be staid or sedentary but is rather full of just the right sort of mischief and adventure. When he grabbed his guitar and started to sing, people either sat in silence enraptured or broke into raucous song. But what I remember most about Glen was that he was always going, always on the move. Not because he had somewhere to be but because he had someone to be with; that someone was everyone, one at a time and in groups small and large. Glen was always on the go because he just couldn't wait to tell you about Jesus, this divine friend and Savior whose love is with you always; this Jesus who will never leave you alone. Glen was a fisher of people; he helped me discover the joy of being caught in the loving lattices of God's net. Thank you, God, for Glen. Thank you, God, for all the saints who have been at our side, who said yes with us, when Jesus looked into our eyes and told us of the Kingdom of love, the fullness of time, the good news that is turning our lives around, life out of death, forever and ever and ever.
7. Today, again, Jesus comes into our lives. The Kingdom of God, grace upon grace, has come near. The time is fulfilled, and Christ fills all in all. Will you repent? Do you believe? Fear not. In the waters of baptism, your age-old,

wrong-way, bad-news life has ended. You are raised, alive, *new*. The Spirit lives in you. Time's up, friends. Just like that. The Kingdom of God is near, here. Christ, who was dead, is alive. Christ fills all in all. You need not wait any longer. He is here, and you are his. What can we do – what will you do – but follow him into newness of life and the unending joys of discipleship? Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep you hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.