



Third Sunday after Epiphany

January 24, 2021

Prelude: "Voluntary"

Charles Stokes

Gathering

Acolyte: Jesus Christ is the light of the world. We light this candle as a sign that Christ has come and Christ will come again. As the light pushes back darkness let us walk with, learn from, and worship Jesus Christ.

Liturgist: My soul finds rest in God; my hope comes from him.

All: Truly God is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation depends on God. He is my mighty rock, my refuge.

Liturgist: Trust in the Lord at all times, you his people.

All: Let us pour out our hearts to God, for God is our refuge.

Liturgist: One thing God has spoken, two things have we heard:

All: Power belongs to you, God, and with you, Lord, is unfailing love.

Psalm 62:5-11 adapted

All Singing: 370 "My Soul Finds Rest"

God's Greeting
Passing the Peace

Reconciliation

Liturgist: After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.

All: “The time has come; the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Silent confession and reflection

Liturgist: As Jesus walked beside the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fisherman. He said,

All: “Come, follow me.” *Mark 1:14-17*

All Singing: “The Kingdom of God”

**The Kingdom of God is justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
Come, Lord, and open in us the gates of your kingdom.**

Liturgist: Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ Jesus even when we were dead in our transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.

All: **And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.**

Liturgist: For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.

All: **For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.** *Ephesians 2:4-10 adapted*

All Singing: **590 “O, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing”**
Singing verses 1, 2, 4, 6, and 8

Proclamation

All: **Lord God, may your Word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

Scripture: Mark 1:14-20

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.

When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

All: **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon: Inaugural Speech

All Singing: 129 “We Will Follow”
Singing verses 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6

Dedication

Prayers of the People

All Singing: 965 “Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow”

Benediction

Worship Leaders

Pianist / Vocalist:	Erin Pacheco
Organist / Flutist / Vocalist:	Lynn Hollender
Vocalists:	Josiah Friesen, Russ Hollender
Acolyte:	Melina & Anne Uzueta
Liturgist:	Elizabeth van den Brink
Prayer:	Jason van den Brink
Sound / Video:	Schuyler Roozeboom
Minister:	Roger Nelson

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Text: Mark 1:14-20
Title: Inaugural Speech
Date: 01.24.21
Roger Allen Nelson

In 1972, when I was 13, I put on a light blue button-down shirt and a red and blue striped tie and gave a speech as George McGovern for our junior high presidential election. I got shellacked. But ever since I've paid attention to presidential speeches and the power of the spoken word, and as it turns out, most memorable presidential lines come from inaugural speeches.

Lincoln's line that, "Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other...." comes from his second inaugural address.

FDR opened his inauguration speech with, "...first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes...."

At the end of his inauguration speech JFK said, "And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country...."

President Trump's line, "This American carnage stops right here and stops right now." Stands out.

Joe Biden said, "On this January day, my whole soul is in this: Bringing America together, uniting our people, uniting our nation. And I ask every American to join me in this cause."

You get the idea....

At the beginning of a new administration there's an inaugural address that speaks to the spirit of the moment, the demand of the day, and sets a new direction and purpose. It's been said that Presidents campaign in poetry and govern in prose. An inaugural speech is somewhere in the middle. They are typically lyrical but they are also meant to turn the page and begin the action steps. They are meant to be memorable and purposeful. They are meant to move your heart and your feet.

And, in that spirit, I'd offer that our text this morning is the inaugural speech of Jesus.

Consider...

Mark writes his gospel at a brisk pace with no wasted motion. This is not exalted art; this is the gospel as text message. So, just fourteen verses after the opening line, "The beginning of the good news about Jesus..." the first words of Jesus are, "The time has come...."

The Greek word for time here is *kairos*.

Kairos is not chronological time, but time that's ripe, time that's ready, time that's full. Eugene Peterson translates the first words of Jesus as, "Time is up!"

So, as John is put in prison (and the language here has the sense that he's being handed over to be put to death) Jesus steps forward and announces that the critical moment has arrived.

Time's up!

This is not just any day.

This is inauguration day.

The kingdom of God is near.

Therefore, repent, believe this is good news, and follow.

Now, that line doesn't have the lyrical lilt that Luke highlights at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

That's Luke's beginning, but Mark's inaugural call is memorable for its austerity and its call to action.

The kingdom is near: repent, believe, and follow.

Some grammar here might be helpful...

The nearness of the kingdom is an indicative; what follows are imperatives. The kingdom is a reality; now do these things. And, the imperatives all have a continuous sense: be repenting, be believing, be following. This is not a one-shot deal this is a way of being.

And, with that inaugural address Jesus begins to choose his transition team, fill his cabinet, and call together a community.

Let me offer a couple observations....

I may have mentioned before that I've been to Israel. On each trip I was struck by the verdant beauty of Galilee. While there are rocky canyons and a great deal of the land is now irrigated for modern agriculture, it's neither barren wasteland nor bustling economic hub; it's mostly rolling rural hills, it's the hinterlands, it's fly-over country, it's the boondocks.

And yet, when Jesus inaugurates his Kingdom and calls his first followers that's where he goes. He doesn't go to the corridors of power or the halls of history. He doesn't first call priests and politicians. He doesn't go to banks, brokerages, and the best schools. He doesn't storm the senate or set up shop in the temple. He goes to Galilee. He goes to those without power, without voice, and without clout.

That's not to suggest that Jesus doesn't love the wealthy and the powerful. That's not to say that Jesus doesn't eventually engage tax collectors and governing authorities. But it is to recognize that Jesus didn't inaugurate his kingdom on the steps of the capital,

but in the back of a barn,

on the side of a beach,

on a splintered cross.

And at the end of Mark's gospel, it's worth noting that when Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome go to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus, the angel instructs them to go back to Galilee.

He has risen. He's not here.... Go, tell his disciples and Peter, "He is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."

Dear friends, the gospel begins and ends in Galilee and I don't think it's a stretch to suggest that Galilee is symbolic of where most of us live. The gospels proclaim that God in Christ enters into common life, with common folks, in common places. The gospels announce that the kingdom is near, not in the highest heavens, but in the ordinary common corners of life.

And, if Jesus inaugurates his kingdom in the backwaters of Galilee then there's hope for folks in the south suburbs of Chicago who are doing the best they can to live and breathe and find meaning in life. As God calls fishermen to follow, so too would he call engineers and garbage haulers and bartenders and phlebologists and professors. So too would he call me and you.

The kingdom is near: repent, believe, and follow.

Tom Long, a preacher to preachers, recalls that when his children would misbehave, he would use a phrase that his parents used with him. He would say to his kids, "that was uncalled for." Then he adds this:

Strange phrase, when you think about it: uncalled for. As if behavior were supposed to be called for. As if who I am was dependent upon someone calling for me..... (And yet) it's also a wonderful phrase because it touches our deepest human fear, a fear deeper than the fear that we will be bored, a fear deeper than the fear that we will not find ourselves. The deepest of all human fears is that, ultimately, and finally, we will not be called for.

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Jesus goes to Galilee and calls for Simon and Andrew, James and John. There's no indication of their qualifications or commitments. There's no word if they were restless, religious, spiritual, indifferent, or particularly gifted or good. There's no theological admissions exam, no morality training, no checking credentials. None of that seems to matter. What matters is that Jesus calls for them. And they're then given the willingness, the courage, the faith to follow this inaugural call.

Jesus calls for them to follow in the same way that students walked behind rabbis. He invites them into an extended essay on what it means to follow the will and way of God. And therefore, this quartet of fishermen follow as he welcomes sinners and eats with tax collectors.

They follow as he opens the scriptures and prays.

They follow as he engages the powers and finds his place with the powerless.

They follow as he breaks conventions about race and religion.

They follow Jesus to the cross and to the empty grave....

Look. We all long to be called for. We long to be called for something of import, something authentic, something beyond fear or frivolity. We long to be called for something more than self....

And so even today, wherever you are this morning, wherever your Galilee, can you hear Jesus calling for you? Do you hear the inaugural call of the Kingdom – calling to move your heart and your feet? Calling for you to follow the way of Jesus....

We were reminded in these last few weeks and months that administrations come and go. Presidents serve their terms and pass the baton. Power is fleeting and the institutions and practices that hold our democracy together are fragile. The inaugural address of a new president while inspiring is quickly met with the realities of politics in a fallen world.

And while not to diminish the importance of politics and governance, I'm grateful for the call of Jesus. Not a call out of this world, not a call away from neighbor or enemy, and maybe even a call back to Galilee. But in following that call, whoever we are and wherever we are, we will find signs of a kingdom that will never fade or fail, and we will come to know the One who call for us.

Do you hear Jesus calling for you?

The kingdom is near: repent, believe, and follow.

Thanks be to God.
Amen.