

Sermon January 24, 2021

Text: Mark 1:14-20

I first saw a pitch pipe when my dad pulled out his old violin. It had been put away for years, but on that day in the kitchen, a family of five had lots of fun dancing around the house to the sound of a violin. The pitch pipe was part of the fun because we all got to learn how to use it. There was a certain unity in that experience of finding the pitch and using our minds and voices and our bodies.

We humans like being together and human cultures everywhere have found ways to organize for common purposes, such as getting food and defending the home place. Usually this leads to a form of leadership. People have always formed extended family groups and, as in the ancient Hebrew culture, a patriarch, that is a wise older father was the authority figure. (Yes, some cultures have matriarchs)

We humans need to cooperate around a leader. Sometimes this is called 'authority', but whatever we choose to call it, our individual lives are affected by the authorities in our society. Authorities can guide us and make plans for the future, but the age-old question is, which authority is worthy? That is to say, which system, which 'kingdom' is given us by God to lead for the good of all?

Some newer Christians and some younger believers are surprised to hear that Jesus began his ministry with an announcement of a new kingdom. His first public words following his baptism were, "The kingdom of God has come near!" To some it may have seemed Christ was announcing a new political movement or beginning a new social system.

Mark begins the telling of Jesus' ministry without background. Jesus' appearance seems sudden. In the Gospel according to Mark, Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan River and is briefly tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Then John, the baptizer, is arrested. With his arrest, Jesus starts his own public work. Mark gives us Jesus' signature statement: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news".

It was a welcome announcement. It was an answer to the prayers of the people. It was a call to turn away from all kinds of false authority and face God, to believe God's promises.

But it is not an entirely new kingdom Jesus announced. People had prayed for years that there would be a liberator. The Hebrew and Jewish people had longed for the day when their king would rule directly and freely. They prayed for the coming of the kingdom of God.

Jesus dared to say the longed-for time had come. The Kingdom of God that Jesus announced had certain goals from the beginning. First, belief in the Good News. Next, inviting everyone to participate. A unique part of Jesus' invitation was that sinners, outcasts and unethical people are invited first! After that, watching listening, praying, healing and feeding are goals of His Kingdom.

Jesus revealed that God is present in our world.

That is still good news! Our search for true leadership leads to Jesus Christ, Son of God. WE do not need to worry that His kingdom is falling apart or going awry.

Unlike our human networks and systems, within Christ's community we need not slip in to fright and impulsive moves. With the coming of the rule of God, we are on pitch with God. We can listen to the voice of God and sing along, dance along, walk along with a faith community when we find one.

Like a violin player, Jesus leads the crowd and it grows larger as more and more people hear the invitation. Turn this Way! Follow Jesus of Nazareth! Live out the call to love one another. Trust His Pitch, follow and live.