“For God Alone”

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 Psalm 62:5-12 Mark 1:14-20

Third Sunday after Epiphany, Year B, January 24, 2021

First Presbyterian Church, Sandpoint, Idaho

Andy Kennaly, Pastor

When someone asks, “Excuse me, but do you have the time?” we usually interpret that as a technical question. If you have a watch, you can check it and tell them what it says. Or, nowadays, people check their cell phones. But questions about time can also be existential, not just clock time measured as chronology, but quality time, appropriate time, measured as Kairos. Each of the three scriptures we read this morning mention time, contributing to their story in terms of logistics and function, and also adding depth to the felt-sense, the experience the theme of the story draws out, and the context of the narrative.

Paul assumes Christ is returning immediately and the imminent return of Jesus will relativize everything else. He has a sense of urgency as he says “the appointed time has grown short; from now on…” and he goes on describing changes to core aspects of that culture and human experience. But in the larger arch of scripture, the Spirit is sharing more than structural, cultural assumptions; but looks deeper into what makes life’s very foundations.

Contrast this “time growing short” in Paul’s writing to Mark’s gospel setting up the scene of Jesus calling his first disciples. Jesus comes “to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’” The prequal sentence that often gets passed by is verse 14, but it’s pivotal in setting the tone, saying, “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee…”

Jesus is feeling the political pressure, he knows life is on the razor’s edge and the establishment is not happy with the likes of John or Jesus. Galilee is away from those centers of power and pressure. He’s now in the sticks, out in the country, he has a little space, and yet even carrying the pressure of John’s arrest in the front of his mind, he still proclaims the news of God as “good.” Jesus says, in this context, “the time is fulfilled.” “Fulfilled” has a quality to it as if there is nothing worth fearing, that things are simply as they are while life makes its ebbs and flows. That something is “fulfilled” means it’s connected and not random or detached. It may not be pretty, and I’m sure Jesus knew John, his cousin, arrested, was likely in deep trouble that would not be reversed at this point. Going forward is what helps the fulfillment find full expression, and yet, it’s because fulfillment has found full expression that we are enabled to go forward. Time, in this sense, is not linear. Eternity is not just time without end, it is the source of time, transcending time, outside of time; alpha and omega, beginning and end, simultaneously. Eternity isn’t what comes next after Earthly time, but a quality all its own that immerses time, and this is why time is fulfilled, fully filled, and fully inclusive of Divinity, holiness, hallowed and held by the very nearness of God who sustains it. We are invited to notice this; to turn and catch in the peripheral the action and activity of God. We can trust this living Presence, and stake our life on it being good news. This is why Jesus goes to Galilee even after John is arrested, not only as a *retreat from aggression*, but to *complete the progression*, and *embody the confession* that God is good, and we can trust this holy Presence.

Let’s take a side trip for a moment and notice that those first disciples are in two pairs, Simon and Andrew, who are casting a net into the sea, and James and John, who are repairing, mending the nets they used for fishing. There’s a sense of immediacy as they leave their fishing, their nets, their boats, and follow Jesus. What an amazing picture of discipleship in community, casting nets and repairing nets, knowing when to lay them down. There is ebb and flow, action and contemplation, movement and stillness, activity and recovery, call and response. There’s an immediacy with Jesus very close, and the call to heed, the voice to hear. Those first verses seem large and thematic about God’s goodness, and these other verses more practical and expressive of the ways we participate, respond to, and work with each other, both when things are functional, things working swimmingly, and when they are broken, not holding up to the ideal. That’s the church, that’s community following in faith. As they leave their father in the boat with the hired men, this also reminds us that discipleship is more dynamic than conventional thinking, traditional assumptions, cultural expectations, or even our own egoic limitations. Discipleship is a call to awareness in living a Christ-centered life.

This is part of the amazing dance between Psalm 62 and Paul’s passage in Corinthians. While Paul is looking for imminent return and time is short, the Psalmist calls us to trust God at all times, pouring out our hearts to God our refuge. While Paul lists out things like marriage and mourning and rejoicing and possessions and dealing with the world; things that are core aspects of most cultures and human experience in general, the Psalmist puts into words the real purpose of Paul’s desire to relativize these things. Rather than a chronological issue, life in Christ is substantive. Looking for true fulfillment, the only place to turn is God. Nothing else fills the void, or taps in deep enough to resonate with the eternal core of our soul. As Augustine of Hippo said in the fourth century in his book, [*Confessions*](https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/42572-thou-hast-made-us-for-thyself-o-lord-and-our), “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.” (Goodreads.com quotes, linked above). The Psalmist says something the same only different, “For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from [God]. [God] alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.”

Maybe this is the verse Jesus had in mind as he hears the news of John getting arrested and still decides to go into public ministry, openly proclaiming the goodness of God, the fullness of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us as spirit and matter meet in divine union of sacred creation. Only God satisfies the internal craving we have for the infinite. Marriage is not infinite, “until death do us part” means there is an end, and mourning and rejoicing have limits and balance each other over the long haul, just as buying and dealing take place within a container called time and space and whatever economic system rules the day; limited dimensions.

Paul says, “from now on…” for he knows that the risen Christ has changed everything and a life of resurrection is a life of eternity, now. We don’t have to wait, but we can die before we die, trusting that “on God rests our deliverance and our honor,” that God is our refuge in ways that nothing else can satisfy. We can awaken to the Spirit, open our hearts to God with courageous humility and discover they are filled, flooded with Living Water, washing and renewing.

In France, there’s a religious community in Taizé that connects with spiritual pilgrims, seekers, and people wanting the simplicity of imminent connection with the transcendent in the context of community. Taizé chants, like the ones we use for Lenten and Advent devotionals, have short phrases that get sung repeatedly, meditatively helping us focus as we shed life’s distractions and simply “be.” One of those songs is called, “In God alone.” [The lyrics say](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glQv3Ra4KrE), “In God alone my soul can find rest and peace, in God my peace and joy. Only in God my soul can find its rest, find its rest and peace.” In my sermon text, I’ll link a You Tube video you can watch, or listen to, and I’ve shared it to the church Facebook Page as well.

That song echoes the Psalmist’s, “For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him.” Sometimes silence is the only solace, for nothing else fulfills our soul’s deepest longing; for unity, wholeness, peace, love; qualities of God’s Presence that have no end and are fully-filling.

Some “times” waiting, involves both chronology and quality. May God grant us patience to hope, courage to trust, and hope to move forward as Wisdom calls from the future even as Christ fully fills the Present and God sustains us with each breath. Thanks be to God for steadfast love, both NOW, and forever. Amen.