

Sermon – Mark 1:14-20
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“News That’s Never Fake”

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. Fake news. There is, of course, nothing new about fake news, even if the term only recently entered our common consciousness during the last election cycle, referring to intentionally misleading, or just plain false, new stories that peppered our social media feeds. Fake news is just good, old-fashioned yellow journalism. But an interesting thing then happened. Instead of remaining a term to describe news that was patently false, it became a cry to be uttered any time someone didn’t like a particular news story. Fake news, they cry, not because the news is false, but simply because they don’t want to believe it. This, too, is nothing new. It’s a manifestation of what psychologists call confirmation bias, in which we search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that conforms to what we already believe. Are silly facts and data getting in your way? No problem. Just call them fake news and move on. So it goes in this post-truth world, especially in politics.
2. This is not, of course, a phenomenon reserved for politics, or even for news, more generally speaking. We believe what we believe and we’re likely to go on believing those beliefs as long as we can pull it off. Eventually, however, reality has a way of asserting itself. Politicians, for example, can spin this weekend’s blame cycle however they want, but there’s no denying that the government has entered a shut down. That is simply true and, more to the point, the negative effects that will ensue – and be felt by especially the most vulnerable in our midst – will happen. Spin it however you’d like, it’s still

true. For no matter what we call fake, real news is still real. And reality won't be long denied. Relationships fall apart. Jobs are lost. Diagnoses are received. And death, of course, enters in. It's been that kind of month at Grace. In quick succession, we have heard the very real news about Robert, Sue, Bob, Eleanor, and Harold. The emails land in our inboxes as successive gut punches, and cries of fake news will get us nowhere. More than a few of you have shared with me that you dread opening your email in times like these, worried about which piece of all-too-real news will confront you. Reality, especially the reality of death, can only be denied for so long.

3. Into this world, this land of sin and death, comes Jesus. In Mark's telling, the story moves quickly. We still see, it seems, the waters of the Jordan dripping from his clothes; still hear the echoes of the proclamation of his status as the beloved; still feel the defeat of satanic temptation in the wilderness. And now, today, for the first time Jesus speaks: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." Good news? It seems, at first blush – and possibly at second and third blush, too – that this is just more fake news. For what here is good? John the Baptist has been locked up, another victim or Rome's iron grip. And this Jesus? Just another crazed prophet, perhaps, a nobody from Nazareth without anyone yet following him. And whom does he recruit first? Simon and Andrew, James and John: four more nobodies, simple fishermen without degrees or distinction. Fake or real, there doesn't seem to be anything good about the word that Jesus has come to proclaim. Our confirmation bias protests against his proclamation.
4. Listen again to Jesus' words: Fulfilled. Kingdom. Repent. Believe. Good news. We believe we live in a world of scarcity, always feeling like we lack enough health or wealth. But Jesus proclaims fulfillment, fullness, that our emptiness will be filled by him. We live in a world in which we feel we have no control, buffeted by the world's whims. But Jesus declares a new Kingdom, a reign in

which God is reasserting divine power. We walk constantly in the wrong direction, giving ourselves over to sin and brokenness, but Jesus invites us to repent, to turn around. Why? To hear *new news, good news*, and believe it. And why would we do such a thing? Simply because it is Jesus, the beloved of God, who calls to us. Jesus is the One who has entered this world to drive away *fake news*, to confront *real news*, and to transform it into *good news* through his death and resurrection; Jesus, who takes the emptiness of death and fills it with life. The Kingdom is here because Jesus is here and, take it or leave it, that's the good news that God has for us today. It is the good news for Robert and Sue, for Bob and Harold and Eleanor, and for those who mourn their deaths. For the Jesus who proclaims this good news will *become* the good news, the One who will be crucified and yet now lives – and in whose promise we live, too. The real news of death has become the good news of life *for you*, for God will not have it any other way.

5. It is this risen Lord Jesus who comes to us again today and calls to us, coming down to the lakeshores of our lives and calling, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” An uncomfortable call, but the call of the Lord nonetheless. This past week I travelled to Mount Carmel Bible Camp for my annual prayer writing retreat. Mount Carmel is halfway between Minneapolis and nowhere (well, Fargo actually). And it was cold. I awoke on Monday to bleak weather, the wind chill at -32. I assumed it would warm up throughout the day, and it did. By noon the wind chill was -31. I remained inside, as close to the fireplace as possible, throughout the day. But there were others in the area that ventured out. I could see them from the lodge windows, driving their pickups out onto the frozen surface of Lake Carlos, making their way to the shanties that dotted the icy lake. Now, I’m not a fisherman in any circumstance, but I certainly couldn’t imagine spending my day fishing through the ice. Apart from the cold, I’m sure I would spend the entire day waiting for the ice to collapse underneath me, no matter how safe anyone

told me it was. And yet others overcame that fear, trusting that they would be supported in their fishing.

6. This, perhaps, is what it means to answer Christ's call to go and to fish, to proclaim the good news that Jesus proclaimed, the good news that is Jesus himself. It's not up to us to freeze the lake so that we can stand upon it, and it's not up to us to usher in the Kingdom – the Kingdom into which you have been brought through less icy waters. The time is fulfilled. The Kingdom is near, in our midst. All we have to do is believe it, and even that is not up to us. The same Jesus who proclaims the good news has sent the Holy Spirit to create trust within us, to help us stand and fish, to answer the call. You, my friends, have been caught by Jesus, and Jesus now sends you to call others. Goodness knows that in this world of fake news and all-too-painful real news that good news is what we need. Drop your nets and whatever else is holding you back, trusting that the Spirit will hold you up. Follow Jesus, and him alone. Go in grace, and shout the news from the mountaintops. Repent, believe, and live in the fullness of the Kingdom that has conquered not only the news cycle, but death itself. It's the realest news there is, and it will not let you down. 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.