

Third Sunday in Epiphany January 24, 2021

Jonah 3:1-5, 10; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20

We are a society obsessed with time. We complain about the lack of it. We try and save it or get more of it by using all kinds of devices and tricks. It's even a topic of our songs; *Time in A Bottle* (Jim Croce), *Time after Time* (Cyndi Lauper), *Time of Your Life (It's something unpredictable, but in the end it's right, I hope you had the time of your life)* (Green Day), *Fly Like an Eagle (Time keeps on slipping, into the future)* (Steve Miller Band). Our lives are based on the ever-ticking clock. The steady drumbeat of another second, minute, hour going by.

Yet, this is not the most important kind of time there is. That is the time that Jesus is talking about in our Gospel today. The time that we obsess over is *Chronos* in the Greek. It's the basis of our words chronology, chronometer, there's even a watch brand named for it. The time Jesus is talking about is *Kairos*.

Now, we know about *Kairos* time, we just don't have a specific name for it. I experienced *Kairos* late last year when it was time for me to get a new to me car. *Kairos* is when it is time to "pop the question". When it is time to find a new job. *Kairos* signifies an opportune time, a suitable or appropriate time, a moment for in this case, for God to act.

Jesus proclaims that the *Kairos* is complete, filled to capacity, ready to go. That the Kingdom of God, let's rather say the Reign of God...because it doesn't talk so much about a geographic space as the breadth of God's authority... the Reign of God has come near, come close, is most definitely NOT social distancing. The opportune time for God is ready to go. The reign of God is close beside us.

What then should be our reaction? Jesus proclaims that we should repent and believe the good news. Most of us hear the word repent and think about saying we're sorry, confessing our sins. But literally the word means to change your way of thinking. Do that and believe the good news.

In all of our texts today, the shape of the world is changing- Jonah is sent by God to warn the Ninevites- the most hated enemies of the Israelites. The Ninevites were people known for their violence and cruelty- yet they repent, and God forgives. Paul reminds the Corinthians that the present shape of the world is passing away. How things used to be is gone, so adjust your living to the new reality. Jesus goes about Galilee proclaiming that the world is changing, the reign of God is coming near- is breathing down your neck, so change your mind to match your thinking to the rightful reign of God.

Kairos time is a moment for God to act. These moments occur throughout scripture and they often are moments of crisis. Moments when there is great conflict or need. It is in these moments that God acts. That God calls God's chosen ones to act, and that action is often something contrary to the normal way of thinking and acting.

The time is fulfilled, Jonah, go proclaim a word that will save your enemies. The time is fulfilled and the shape of the world and how it works is changing, says Paul. Change how you live as a witness to that. The time is fulfilled, says Jesus, the reign of God is close, change how you are thinking. As Paul reminds us in Romans 12, "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind," and believe in the good news! The good news, the gospel,

to truly be believed, needs us to think about the world differently. It requires a transformation, a change of mind, almost like being born all over again.

Sound familiar? For in the waters of baptism we are reborn children of God, citizens in the Kingdom of God, living under the reign of God. All that clouded the thinking of our minds is washed away and we see things in new ways. Riches aren't signs of God's blessing, but weights that restrain us from entering God's reign, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God." Mark 10:23. Enemies are not to be hated, but loved and prayed for. The sick are not to be shunned, avoided as unclean, but comforted and healed.

My friends, we are living in a *Kairos* moment and the reign of God is at hand. The very reign which we pray each week would come, not only for our world... but for us. We are in a time when the shape of the world is changing. We are in a time of crisis, certainly. The pandemic and the profound loss that comes with it- loss of life, of wealth, of health, of livelihoods and dreams. Economic hardship and insecurity. The stirring of long simmering differences in our nation bursting into violence and division.

It is a time when we are called to repent. To change our thinking. To exchange the stinkin' thinkin' of this world for the mind of Christ.

Jesus has come to the shores of this time in 2021, looks us in the eyes and says, "You are a baptized child of God, deserving of love and respect, and I call you to change the world and follow me." The call of Jesus in our lives comes as it does with those first disciples- in the middle of our work, our lives, our play. With projects left undone, with children to raise, homework to do. With the bathroom

yet to clean, a retirement to live. The call of Jesus, as modeled by those first disciples, is one to be answered without hesitation.

For some of us, it will be a call to get up and go. Go to new places, into parts of the world most of us would find- daunting, even dangerous. I have had friends like that over the years. A call to the West Bank to teach English to Palestinian children, to the homeless of Winston-Salem- to give them food, showers, compassion.

But for most of us, the call to follow- to usher in the reign of God- comes right where we are. We promise when we affirm our baptism that we will proclaim the good news of God in Jesus Christ through word and deed. That we will speak and live as if the reign of God were here...now. To be physicians of the soul and heal those who are injured in spirit- by speaking words of comfort, acceptance, support, and healing. By striving for peace and justice in all that we do. To speak up when something is wrong, but to do so without violence to others. Speaking always for the good of others. To build them up, as Paul reminds us, not tear them down.

And when we do. When our speaking and our living within our households embodies the reign of God come near. When our speaking and our living within our work embodies the reign of God come near. When our speaking and our living within our public lives embodies the reign of God come near. The reign of God will have indeed come near.

Because God has claimed us as God's own in baptism, and Jesus has called us to it, and the Holy Spirit has equipped us for it. And in living it- God will use us to change the thinking of the world. From the stinkin' thinkin' of the world which

lives much like the reign of Rome. A reign where might makes right. Where wealth and power flow to a few. Where dissent will bring swift punishment and even death. Where peace is held through fear. Where even those claiming to follow Jesus, the Prince of Peace, do so within a riot that embodies everything but the reign of God.

Jesus has come to the shores of 2021 and is looking you in the eyes and saying, “Rob, Cindy, Lucy, John... you are a baptized child of God, deserving of love and respect, the time is fulfilled. It is time for the reign of God to come near. Dip again into the waters of baptism. Wash from your own mind again the clouded thinking of the world and see as I see. Then come, follow me, and we will change the world.”

With God, all things are possible. So, come to this Meal today, to be strengthened for this calling by the Body and Blood of Christ. With God all things are possible, so dip again into the waters of your baptism to be refreshed and renewed in your own thinking.

Then let us answer the call of our Lord, for we are baptized children of God, deserving of love and respect. The time is fulfilled, the reign of God has come near. And God will use us to change the world.

May it be so.