



I Don't Have Time for This

Rev. Ned Allyn Parker, preaching

Text: Mark 1:14-20

Seattle First Baptist Church

January 22, 2012

Our scripture from the Inclusive Bible this morning includes these words: “After John’s arrest, Jesus appeared in Galilee proclaiming the Good News of God:

“This is the time of fulfillment,” Jesus says, “The reign of God is at hand!”

“...the time of fulfillment.” Other translations read, “The time is fulfilled.” In Spanish: “Ha llegado el tiempo...” The time has come. The time is... now.

“The time is now. The Kingdom of Heaven is here.” Mark records these as the first words of Jesus’ ministry: The *time is now*. And yet, we’ve made the whole thing a waiting game, haven’t we?

Time is, itself, fascinating. It is complex enough that philosophers, including Plato, have speculated on its nature... and yet it’s simple enough that its passage can go without notice. My favorite Star Trek movie was the fourth. I sat captivated as Kirk and his crew maneuvered the stolen Klingon War Bird around the sun, using its gravitational force to send them back in time. *Timeline*, my favorite book by Michael Crichton, depicts archaeologists travelling through time to see the site they’re excavating in its rightful chronological context. Depicted in these ways, time is even enchanting.

The beginning of time is contested by Big Bang theoreticians and creationists, though I might suggest their ideas need not be mutually exclusive. Creationists believe that time began on the first day of creation when a divine... instigator separated the light from the dark, distinguishing a *then* from a *now* and calling it *good*. While scientists hypothesize that time began at a point called the Singularity – a moment when a shift in dense energy caused it to become matter and that matter the ingredients for the cosmos. This same theory suggests that the Singularity still exists – the moment when time began still exists – as the outer edge of our universe moving from what is... to what will be. A theory that requires its own bit of faith, does it not?

Jesus said, “The time is fulfilled; the time is now...” Whether you believe we exist in this moment that began four thousand years ago or 13 and a half trillion years ago, this moment we have is... well, it’s really something miraculous. *This* moment – *whatever* is happening in it.

And yet when the world asks us to match its pace – to match its pace in the form of children, traffic or church... when we ourselves get caught up in interruptions, interventions or even inspiration... too often our answer is as close to a cultural mantra as we’ve got in this 21st Century: “I don’t have time for this.”

I don’t have time for this. I don’t have time for this.... Before I take up more of *your* time, will you pray with me? Creator God, help us to be present to your Spirit in this moment. I pray our words,

songs and thoughts be right with you. Give us rest and fulfillment in this time together. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

Built in 1806, the New North Church is the second oldest church in the coastal village of Hingham, MA, and one of the oldest freestanding houses of worship in the commonwealth. Updates have been made to the plumbing and electricity, but architecturally and structurally the building sits unchanged. The pews still have doors on them – the doors for families who had enough money to buy their place to sit down during the longer sermons. The special section set aside for freed slaves remains visible – a reminder of where we have progressed from what was once ‘progressive’... and a challenge tempting us toward something more still.

During the summer between my fourth and fifth years of seminary I had the great pleasure of preaching at New North, the second oldest church in Hingham, MA. My sermon, titled “Christmas in June,” explored the need to remember the joy and wonder of Christmas throughout the year – the sacredness of God entering *time* in the form of a tiny defenseless baby. Never is the “God With Us” so tangible as during the Christmas season. Right? And so, on that warm summer Sunday we sang Carols and put out the Crèche and placed Advent candles on the Communion Table. In that hour we sought the sacredness that is Christmas-TIME.

This particular Sunday also happened to land right smack-dab in the middle of my June two-week intensive summer-term class – two of the busiest weeks of a seminarian’s year... and as I sang, “Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive its King; let every heart prepare room,” as I sang those words of joy, thanksgiving, celebration, and welcome to the child who would change the world... I kept thinking, “I don’t have time for this... I just don’t have time for this.”

After offering my sermon and then a closing blessing, I practically sprinted to where Samara sat in her pew. “Let’s go,” I said as I vigorously nodded my head toward the door and the getaway car that waited for us beyond the narthex, as I pictured the colossal stack of books I still had to read before Monday morning. Preaching about the sacredness of time had taken up so much of my ‘sacred’ time that I was worried there would be too few hours to complete my homework – you know, the homework that would hopefully make me a better minister... and so we left... without even stopping at coffee hour...

Jesus said, “The time is now; the Kingdom of Heaven is here... now.”

How often do we respond, “I don’t have time for that,” when we hear Jesus’ declaration? This question, as I ask it, isn’t a challenge – I ask because the *immediacy* of Jesus’ call should, at the very least, encourage us to pause and reflect on what it might mean in our lives.

The Bible’s use of time isn’t only a tool for temporal contextualization, but also a way to call out significant parallels, thereby highlighting sacred people and occasions. The story of the six days of creation and the seventh day of rest, and God’s work and presence within that time remind us that our week has a Holy framework. Time has *sacred* significance. Rabbi Irving Greenberg writes, “[Quote] The Exodus teaches us that history is not an eternal recurrence – ever repeating but never progressing – but a time stream with direction. History is not a meaningless cycle but the path along which the Divine-human partnership is operating to perfect the world. [End quote]”

Remember that immediately preceding our passage this morning, Jesus is baptized and goes out into the wilderness for forty days – as if to relive the Israelites’ Exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land, making a connection with what has been to what will be.

And Dorothy C. Bass writes, “[Quote] In Jesus, God did not call us to escape out of time and into God; rather God came to humanity in time. Time itself is made holy by the presence of God. [End quote]” Time itself... My fear is that when we don’t have time for the world around us, then we don’t have time for God.

So, the way I see it, we have seven days: six days to do and one day to be.

First there is the *do*-ing: there is a constant call to action within the pages of our sacred text – fundamentalists might respond to this as a call to evangelism with a sprinkling of social justice, and progressives might respond to it as a call to social justice with a sprinkling of evangelism. Despite the disparity in these responses, I think we are all answering the same call uttered by Jesus on multiple occasions: “Go and do likewise.” Go and do. Go and do.

And yet the first story shared in the pages of Genesis includes a time to simply be – a seventh day to be at rest, to be one with, to be within and surrounded by without being affected or affecting the parts of the world that are already called “good.”

But on those days we are called to *do* we get distracted, disoriented and disconnected by society and with society. On the day we are called to simply *be* we are pulled into sports commitments, community action and... wait for it... commission meetings.

For both the *doing* and the *being* we find ourselves murmuring this morning’s mantra: “I don’t have time for this.”

If indeed the “time is now and the Kingdom of Heaven is here,” what is our responsibility? I think our responsibility is to be the Jesus that Jesus only had 33 years to be.

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In our scripture this morning after Jesus says, “The time is fulfilled,” he follows with: “Change your hearts and minds,” which of course was traditionally translated, “Repent!” ‘Repent’ isn’t exactly a word that rolls off the tongue in progressive circles. But, the Greek, “*metanoia*” is really about the opportunity to get a fresh start, the opportunity to turn away from distraction and live your life to it’s fullest – an opportunity to recognize the import of Jesus’ pronouncement that “The kingdom of heaven is here,” a pronouncement that if we understand spatially, suggests: “the kingdom of heaven is here – amongst us... because of us.” The implication is that the kingdom of heaven is what *WE* make of it – what we *make time* to make of it.

Jesus then finds these fisherman and calls out to them, and what’s their response when he says, “Follow me”? Their response is immediate. They recognize something in this man from Nazareth; they leap from their boats and they give him... well, they give him their *time*.

There are lots of little clichés about time and what to do with it, aren’t there? “No time like the present.” “Don’t forget to stop and smell the roses.” In 1989, thanks to Robin Williams’ character in Dead Poets Society, we reintroduced, “*Carpe diem*” – “Seize the day” to our modern lingo. While I appreciate these little reminders, it’s not really about what we do with time in frivolity or even about stopping to notice something within the context of time – it’s about what we *DO* with the time we

HAVE and how we EXIST in that time. Bible translator George Lamsa reminds us that, “[Time] comes only once and never returns.”

If this time is a gift, how do we respond? Do we express our deepest appreciation for the gift and use it in the Spirit it was given, or do we tuck it up on some high shelf where it gets dusty going unnoticed, unused? Is our response similar to that of those fishermen? Do we react immediately, *jumping* at the chance to do and to be?

How do we respond... and what are the consequences of our response?

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In the afternoon, after I had preached at New North Church, my cell phone rang as I sat surrounded by my books. Of course I didn't have *time* to answer when it rang, and so when I listened to the voicemail later I was surprised to hear the speaker introduce himself as “the head deacon from New North Church, the second oldest church in Hingham, Massachusetts.” “Pastor Parker,” he said, “I'm just calling to let you know that we did find the Advent candles when we smelled smoked... Luckily they had put themselves out... and the table wasn't too badly singed... We can cover up the wax... with something... big.”

I didn't have *time* to wait, to greet, to do what I had been called there to do... I didn't have time to be present in the moment or present to the people I would have met in that moment. But I *would* have had time. I would have had time if I had known that I would be the cause of near-catastrophe.

If you can believe it, I was asked back to New North Church and because I figured I would remember my way – and because we really didn't have time to Mapquest them – we didn't bother to get directions and we got lost on our way. As a result we rushed in during the announcements, after the first hymn had already been sung. Even when we don't think it outright, our actions imply that *my* time is more sacred than *your* time, and yet it shouldn't be about what is yours or mine – but what is God's.

Jesus said, “the time to get a fresh start is now, Heaven is here among these people. Follow me and learn to help them.” The response of those first four disciples was immediate, as they jumped from their boats into the sea, made their way to shore and followed him up from the sands. When Jesus calls to us, I pray we all make time to go and do likewise.

Amen.