

The Future Is Now
Mark 1.14-20
January 24, 2021
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Now after John was arrested, Jesus came 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." As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

How is your sense of timing?

They say, "timing is everything." And, if I am honest, I am jealous of those of you who have it.

I am envious of those comedians who make us laugh because they have such a sharp sense of timing. I never really mastered the piano because I couldn't figure out those time signatures. And let's not even talk about dancing. I have very little a sense of rhythm. My internal timing is off. I break out into a cold sweat whenever we are supposed to clap along in time with some great gospel music.

That's part of the reason I struggle with the gospel of Mark. Mark has a finely tuned sense of timing. In the passage Dr. Hunter read for us at the beginning of the service, Jesus is preaching after John is arrested and he says: "The time is fulfilled – the time is now because the reign of God is near; repent and believe the good news." Leave behind that old way of life and that old identity and open yourself to the world you have been dreaming of.

And "immediately" Simon and his brother Andrew and James and John, the sons of Zebedee, leave everything behind and follow. They even leave poor Daddy Zebedee sitting in the boat with the hired hands.

(That's another sermon. What happens when you are the one who gets left in the boat?)

Timing is everything and, for Mark, it's about "now" and "immediately."

And the problem is: I'm not an "immediately" kind of guy. I am the kind of person who thinks back on a conversation from two days ago and says to himself: What I *should* have said ... or why didn't I say *that*. The perfect comeback for any comment is always at least a couple days away.

But sometimes, the situation calls for immediacy. We can't wait for the perfect words or the perfect time or the right game plan. "The time is now," Jesus says, and whatever the personalities of Simon and Andrew and James and John, they responded immediately.

I am totally fascinated by this. Why would they run off and follow this itinerant preacher when their world was so fragile?

Maybe their profession as fishermen taught them to be patient and to pay attention to the times of day and the movement of the water so that, when the time was right for a good catch, they could react immediately.

It would help me to know why they reacted this way. But we don't know. We only know that they did.

Bible scholar Ted Smith says that "Mark begins like an alarm clock, persistently declaring the time and demanding some response."

And speaking of alarms, Mark slips in this troubling note that John has just been arrested. Is this really the best time, Jesus, to be heading out on a preaching tour? Maybe you should let things cool down a bit. And who on earth would be crazy enough to get recruited for a mission like this now anyway?

There is more than one kind of alarm ringing. And yet the disciples "immediately" leave everything they have known and follow.

No doubt Simon and Andrew and James and John, like us, have some vague idea about a better future – that vision of "beautiful city," Sarah was singing about. But all the disciples had to do was look around and see how far off that future must be.

When I was at what was then First Baptist Church of Evanston, Illinois, the pastor recruited ten of us to a committee to help move the church off its plateau onto some higher mountaintop. Each of us agreed to ten commitments that included encouraging ten other members to join. I don't remember all those commitments but I do remember the name of our group. We were the "Future is Now" committee.

It struck me then that, in our usual sense of timing, we look at the future as something "out there," something ahead, something shining off in the distance. But what we were saying was

that whatever “future” we hoped for was already present with us now. We just had to recognize it, act on it, and nurture it.

The outcome of the “Future is Now” was that several things changed and the church grew. But the more important thing, I think, was that we had a new consciousness about timing. Whatever we hoped for the future, was already present with us, in some form, right now.

As Dr. Hunter reminded us last week, that future of love and justice we dream about isn’t out there in a galaxy far away. It’s here. It’s now. Justice can’t wait. Stand up and speak up now.

I was telling our congregational leaders on Thursday that our American Baptist denomination has a national Anti-Racism Task Force. And they sent out a message this week about how we like to claim Dr. King as one of our own “but far too often we have fallen short of the scope of his dream.” They go on to say:

The time is now for us to claim the mantle left for us on the mountain top by Dr. King. It is time we confront the inherent white supremacy and privilege that have for too long been the foundation upon which our denomination is built even as we claim to be the most diverse denomination in the United States.

These voices among us and alongside us are calling us to a future that is now – in this moment, in this place, in this heart.

And if you needed another voice – a younger one, a brilliant one, a beautiful crystal-clear one – you just need to listen to nation’s first youth poet laureate, Amanda Gorman, at the inauguration on Wednesday. It’s great to read, better to hear, and best to see it as this young woman calls us to the future that is now. On that day she said:

*... while we have our eyes on the future
history has its eyes on us
This is the era of just redemption
We feared at its inception
We did not feel prepared to be the heirs
of such a terrifying hour
but within it we found the power
to author a new chapter
To offer hope and laughter to ourselves*

I can’t do her words justice. But when I heard her voice on Wednesday, immediately my heart opened, my soul sang, my hands wanted to find something to do.

Perhaps we all feel unprepared to be the heirs of this terrifying hour. But in it, right now, is the time for just redemption and the power to write a new chapter for our lives and our life together.

In the end, she says:

The new dawn blooms as we free it
[Maybe that's the line for old Zebedee left in the boat.]
The new dawn blooms as we free it
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it
if only we're brave enough to be it.

Preach it, Amanda, preach it!

Because the future we are dreaming is now. You can hear its voice calling us to leave behind the things that keep us from seeing the light, being the light.

Listen!

And today, if you hear that voice, do not harden your hearts.

NOTES

Ted A. Smith, "Mark 1.14-20," *Feasting on the Word*, David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. (Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p.285. Amanda Gorman, "The Hill We Climb," available on CNN and YouTube.