

Sermon 1.25.09
Rev. Kerry Waller
"Now is the Time"
Psalm 62:5-12 and Mark 1:14-20

Focus: "Fierce urgency of now". Make sermon feel urgent, and make answering our calling feel urgent. Talk about time, as it relates to being called to God's ministry.

Imagine for a second the sound that your alarm clock makes when it goes off in the morning. It is persistent, it declares the time, and demands a response. The Gospel of Mark is a little bit like that. In the Gospel of Mark the time is always now. There is no time in the beginning of the Gospel to give to beautiful birth stories, no manger, no shepherds, no prophets singing to God in the temple as they hold the promised One, a baby, in their arms. Instead, we race through the story of John the Baptist, and Jesus being baptized, the temptation in the desert, and even John's arrest.

Mark is the shortest of all the Gospels, coming in at 16 chapters versus Matthew's 28. Mark is getting to the point, so that we can get on with the story. He doesn't waste words, and so it behooves us to pay attention to the words he does use. Let us turn to Mark, chapter 1: 14-20.

Now, the time is fulfilled, immediately. These are the words that the Gospel uses to show the urgency of Jesus' ministry. Jesus has no time to waste, he moves out into the world and calls people to him immediately.

The word for time in this passage, is best translated as "season" or "moment", as opposed to clock time. This time is like a black hole, it pulls us into the depth of the moment, and you cannot escape from God's time. And God's time is right now. The word of the Lord was coming true right now, God was acting right now, Jesus' ministry among the people was happening right now.

And so Jesus goes to the shore of the Sea of Galilee, proclaiming good news, and calling people to his ministry. Then he sees Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. Come, follow me, he calls. Then he moves to James and John sons of Zebedee and calls them to follow him. These four disciples-to-be came from different classes, were from the wealthy class of fishermen, and the poorest. They were not in the temple, they were not among the high-class folk, but were instead at work, having a normal day when Jesus called them forth to be the beginning of his

ministry. He did not call everyone who was fishing that day to his ministry. This is the proper time and place for these four men. There is a proper time for us all.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a man who was true to his calling even unto death by the Nazis, wrote of Jesus's call in this way: The response of the disciples is an act of obedience. There is no need of any preliminaries, and no other consequence but obedience to the call. The old life is left behind, and completely surrendered. From the start Jesus makes clear that his word is the re-creation of the whole life of man. The only right and proper way is quite literally to go with Jesus. The very first step a man must take is an act which radically affects his whole existence." That is the promise of the cross, the promise we accept in the waters of our baptism: that our life with Christ is not the same as it was before we answered and understood our call to discipleship.

The Christians in the Gospels and in the New Testament all believed that Jesus would come back imminently. They were urged by Paul, author of New Testament letters, not to even get married, because they didn't really have time to latch onto the things of this world before Christ would come back. It was urgent that they get their lives right, because he was coming any moment to call them up to heaven.

They were ready for the moment when Christ would call them. Have we lost such urgency in our lives?

In the charming movie "Stranger Than Fiction" a man, Will Ferrell, goes about his life while the voice of the narrator tells us all about him. He is a precise man, an auditor for the IRS, and does things pretty much the same way every day. Then, one day, he hears the narrator telling us about his day. He hears her speak about his teeth brushing technique, the way he ties his tie, how he rushes for the bus. We go through the rest of Harold's day with him, until on his way home he hears the narrator say "Little did he know that this simple, seemingly innocuous act would thrust him into the path of his imminent death."

Harold had almost gotten used to the voice, and so he starts aware, and begins to scream to the heavens, "What? When? Why my death?" Then he goes a little berserk, meeting with a psychiatrist who is sure he has schizophrenia, to a literary professor who asks crazy questions to try to determine what type of story he might be a part of. Eventually Harold makes peace with the possibility that he cannot do anything to change his fate. He falls for the girl, enjoys his life, tries cookies for the first time

in life. And his story ends heroically. It is only by seizing the moment that he can enjoy his life. It is a popular theme in literature and movies to live in the moment. It is a cliché, but for a good reason.

God interrupts our lives, or perhaps more accurately, God bursts into the banality we have made out of life. Are we ready for God to act in our lives?

Martin Luther King, Jr once preached that "We are now faced with the fact, my friends, that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked, and dejected with a lost opportunity. The tide in the affairs of men does not remain at flood-it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is adamant to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words, "Too late."."

There are times in our life when we cannot afford to stay still, to not act on God's will for our lives. That time is now. What? You thought this was just another Sunday, another beginning of the week? No. Our scripture does not permit us to sit still, to wait for God to call to us a second time. Today is the day, this is the hour, the minute, when we say yes to God's call to us to live as his disciples. Now is the time.

The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news. Believe in the abundance of God, believe in his call for us to love him with all our heart, mind and strength, and to love one another as ourselves; believe in salvation bought for us by Jesus' death on the cross. Believe that now is the time when God's people are to go into the world, ready to serve him, ready to share the good news, ready to be transformed into fishers for people, ready to live like we are saved, joyous, not fearful, excited, not cautious.

Now is the time, for there is no time to waste. There are too many problems in the world, too many people who have not heard the good news, too many issues and needs that deserve God's comfort acted out through his people, through his beloved children who trust in his grace and power. What are you going to let God do in your life because of the good news you have heard today? What have you been keeping God from doing in your life?

It's easy to get stuck in the past. We all are, in our own ways, of course. And there are some people who are fixated on the future, anxious about what may come or what may not, how to make this or that happen. We cannot live only in the past, we cannot live only for the future. Faithful people live in the present. Jesus calls us to live in the moment. This doesn't mean you're not mindful of past and future--you give them their due--but you live in the here and now.

We need to get all we can out of this moment, for this is the moment that God has blessed. This is the moment that God has prepared for us. This is the moment in which we can respond to God's call to us to get out of our boat and follow him.

Being in the moment does not ignore the future and God's promises in the future. It does mean that we do not sacrifice the now for that which is to come. Living in the moment means that we recognize God's promises in this moment, God's call into our lives at this moment. It means we focus on getting our lives on God's track now, it means we examine ourselves, looking for how God can work in our lives for his purposes.

When Jesus called Simon, Andrew, James, and John at the seaside, he might not have come back for them if they hadn't answered. They surely had other things they needed to do. They were hard-working people. But they heard God's voice in the man from Nazareth, and they answered. God is still standing at the shore, calling to his people to ministry with him, to deeper discipleship, to a transformed life. That call is still alive and still just as urgent as it was on that day when Jesus called the disciples to his mission. When God calls you, what will be your answer?

Copyright Rev. Kerry Elizabeth Waller, 2009. Please acknowledge the author if citing these sermons.