

“Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?”

Time is very important to our lives. We want to save time. Indeed, one of the aspects of the modern era was the invention and manufacture of time-saving devices such as kitchen and laundry appliances. These were intended to free up time for leisure activities. The typewriter, then word processor and then computer made the writing and editing of documents, articles, books, speeches, and sermons more efficient. Search engines put information, whether a recipe for tonight’s supper or a citation for a scholarly article, at our fingertips.

Yet we often find ourselves not knowing what to do with the saved time. So we end up wasting it. We play online games incessantly. We watch one of the hundreds of channels of television. Sometimes we just flip channels searching for something worth watching.

Time is important in the Gospel of Mark. It is not something to be saved or wasted, but it is certainly limited. In Mark’s Gospel nothing happens slowly. One of Mark’s favorite words is “immediately.” Everything happens immediately in Mark. In today’s lesson Jesus’s call to follow is so urgent and compelling that the brothers cannot take the time to clean their nets, bring the boat ashore, or finish their fishing they must follow Jesus’ call immediately.

Imagine a call to something that could draw you in so quickly and decisively. Imagine the power of Jesus to make such a demanding request that involved giving up one way of life for another in an instant. The call required not just changing jobs, but leaving friends and family to follow an itinerant preacher. There was no promise of riches, fame, or power from Jesus. He simply said, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

There are other aspects of time in this scripture and it comes in the first verse. “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.’”

We see that Jesus had bided his time to proclaim the Gospel until after John was arrested. John’s ministry needed to be fulfilled. Jesus was not going to be in competition with John. He was waiting to build on John’s ministry of repentance and baptism. I imagine it could have been hard for Jesus to wait. After all, he had been baptized by John which was the inauguration of his public ministry. Then he was driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. There he spent forty days and nights pondering his call as he fasted and prayed. Then he waited in the shadow of John for his time to come.

When he started preaching to the people of Galilee his message was “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” I wonder if the Galileans who heard this message thought Jesus was speaking about the end of Roman rule? Or was it something more

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apocalyptic, the Parousia, the end of time? Or was it, as mystics proclaim, that this kingdom of God was near because it was a spiritual kingdom within each of us?

Whatever we might think Jesus meant there was urgency in it. There was no time to waste. There was also no time to save. Jesus called people then just as he calls us now to *metanoia* (repentance) that cannot wait. We are called to become followers of the one God, YHWH, now. The urgency is not one of dire consequences. Jesus is not saying, “Repent now or the Devil is going to get you,” or “you will be thrown into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.” He is saying, “Repent now because this kingdom of God is too good to miss.” He does not want us to miss out on a single minute of what it means to be infused with the gift that is God’s love. To put it another way, he is not giving us an ominous warning, rather he is inviting us to full and abundant life.

Time is precious. Why waste it in darkness, sadness, and distance from God. Come closer for the kingdom of God is near. It is but a short way to love, freedom, joy, and a life beyond description in the arms of God. Don’t waste a minute more. Don’t think you can save a minute of life as you ponder the call to joy. Be like the first disciples who were willing to give up everything that they knew—work, family, friends, and security—for the unknown but promising life to which Jesus called them and us. If we had altar calls this would be the day for you to immediately, without reservation or hesitation, give your life to Christ or reaffirm your calling.

Do not wait. When this service ends, do not go back to the same old, same old. You have had more than enough of that. Let Jesus into your heart. Don’t give him just a little corner. Give him your whole heart. That is the key to peace and joy beyond all understanding. Accept the invitation immediately, for it is the key to abundant life.