

“Living on Holy Time”

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Scriptures: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51; Hebrews 4:14-5:10 ; John  
12:20-36

I have become increasingly aware of the toll that the technology in my life is taking on many more important things. Now before I start sounding like the speaker I heard in high school who told me I needed to get rid of any form of entertainment that wasn't specifically Christian, let me state it plainly that I will not be advocating for you to throw away your phone. But I have found that limits are necessary when it comes to our devices and all the programs on them. You know things are bad when McDonald's advertises it's app as something that gives off "main app energy," a phrase I assume claims that the McDonald's app is worthy of the major time we spend on our other social media apps. It's worth mentioning that I heard this commercial while I was on my phone. But that a fast food app could conceivably become a time-waster, and the fact that we have come to know certain apps as major time-wasters at all, these things give us a pretty clear picture of the unhealthy nature of our relationship with technology. These devices that were designed to save time, and still do in many helpful ways, have also begun to take that same time back for themselves.

It is that question of time that I think our Scriptures point us to this morning. Not so much time in the sense of minutes and seconds, but in terms of the overarching story God is telling in his broader creation and redemption timeline and in the particular story of our personal journey of following him.

We are used to this other sort of time-telling, of course. We use it all the time in the stories that we tell, read, and share. If I were reading through the Hobbit, I could tell you what page I was on, if I remembered, but that would probably give you zero information about what part of the story I was currently reading. Now if I said that I was reading about the unexpected party, or that the crew had just been captured by the trolls at night, you'd have a much better idea of where I was in the book. It is much the same in God's redemptive story, both broadly in terms of the whole world and personally in our story of knowing him. We could say how old we are to the day, but that doesn't speak to where God has brought us and is leading us. We can give the date on the calendar, and it even is often rendered as the Year of our Lord, but we need to think of time in a different way to see the work that God is up to in the world.

And this is the last dig I will make at social media and devices this morning: the distraction they provide dulls our senses to an awareness of this way of looking at time. Technology is very good at telling us when we

are late for something, or how long it has been since we've logged in. Social media is great at making us feel that we are behind (in life, in finances, in relationships). These things are not very good, however at telling us where we are in God's story. A sense of God's presence and timing comes to us in the times we can be silent and wait, in times of prayer and fasting, not in the glitz and clutter of the chronically-online life.

Jesus says to those who would follow him that we must take advantage of every opportunity we have to take hold of him: "The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you." The time is now!

Hopefully, this Lenten season has been an opportunity for you to engage in thinking about this view of time. And if not, it is not too late! Our Scriptures for this morning give us the opportunity to refocus and look for the ways in which God is calling us to reflect on his timing and where we are in *his* story, on both the macro and individual levels.

I want to begin with the big story, in terms of God's time, or cosmic time. We don't have much of a clearer indication of where we are than our reading from Jeremiah today, where the prophet looks forward to the time of a new covenant while sitting in exile - the result of the first

covenant between God and Israel being broken by Israel's unfaithfulness. Here's what Jeremiah writes from the Lord about this new covenant:

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."<sup>1</sup>

In this brief passage we get so much about the new covenant that is ours in Christ. First, God will make us aware of his commandments through the power of the Holy Spirit living in us - "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts." Next, we have an intimacy with God, where all will know him. It even specifies that this knowledge and intimacy will know no societal or hierarchical bounds - "they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest." You don't need to be a religious official to be close to God in the new way of things. Finally, the new covenant is a covenant of forgiveness. "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." These things are for those of us who live in the post-Jesus era of God's timing. The inner teaching and

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<sup>1</sup> Jer 31:33-34

conviction of the Holy Spirit, intimacy with God that is available to all, and the freedom that comes with God's forgiveness. What a great time to be living! What a glorious covenant it is!

And just as the first covenant was centered on the Temple and the sacrificial rites carried out by the high priest, so too does this new covenant have a Temple, a high priest, and a sacrifice. A couple of weeks ago our readings drew us to reflect on how we are the Temple of God's presence, and this week, our reading from Hebrews draws focus on the one who is both High Priest and sacrifice - Jesus.

Our calendars and the stories we tell ourselves so often hang on the roles of others. I don't have to tell you this in an election year. There is a lot of money and screen time that is going to be dedicated in the coming 6 months to how the very existence of our nation depends on the tenure of whomever wins the White House. Friends, that is thinking too small. For there is a greater seat, and the one who sits in it does not have any term limit or reason to vacate his position. He is the very Son of God who is our High Priest, our mediator to God, the one who is not merely human like his predecessors, but who by laying his life down as the Sacrifice won our salvation.

When we tell stories, they are often framed by who was in charge at the time, “In the year that King Uzziah died,” “When Quirinius was governor of Syria,” “Back in the Eisenhower administration.” This is a fine way to tell linear time, but we must never forget that the most defining aspect of our reality and our story is that we live under the tenure of Jesus the Great High Priest. Our passage from Hebrews highlights his tenderness, his mercy, his perfect obedience. All our hopes are in him. It is Jesus or nothing. Our stories center on him. All with this result: “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”<sup>2</sup>

With those macro elements of the story in place, God’s new Covenant centered on Jesus the eternal High Priest, it is time to get more personal. How do we look to the Scriptures to tell our stories well?

We learn from our Psalm this morning that our personal stories will go through seasons where confession and repentance are necessary. There is a time for everything, the Preacher of Ecclesiastes says, and if we are to tell our stories truthfully, we need to be aware of the moments where we are called to repentance.

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<sup>2</sup> Heb 4:16

David, who wrote Psalm 51, would probably have preferred to go without facing his guilt. Perhaps all of us can't directly relate to David's sin specifically, against God, against Bathsheba, and against Uriah, but we can all relate to the feeling of pushing down that feeling that we've done wrong, that desire to cover it up and hide it from God and others.

Sometimes, God gives us no other option than to face what we have done. God used Nathan the prophet to confront David over his sins and Psalm 51 is David's heartfelt response. No matter what he had done, and he had done great evil, he had the sense of timing to know that it was not too late for him to repent. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." This is the refrain of a life that is cognisant of what time it is.

Finally, if we are paying attention to the timing of our stories, we will be ready to step into the purpose God intends for our lives, the things he has set before us to do. No one illustrates this better than Jesus. Think of the language of timing not only in today's gospel reading, but throughout the Gospel. When his mother wanted him to perform the first miracle of turning water into wine, Jesus initially balked at the suggestion because "My hour has not yet come." If you go through John's gospel, you will see these references to time and the proper timing, culminating of course in Jesus' death on the cross.<sup>3</sup> But here in today's reading there

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<sup>3</sup> See, Wright, *John for Everyone Pt. 2*, 29.

is a turning point. When Jesus hears of the Greeks who want to meet him, a sign that the whole world, not just the people of Israel, are ready to hear the good news, he knows that it is time to face his death, to fulfill his purpose: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."<sup>4</sup>

Now this sense of purpose can be overplayed in our lives. I received some messages growing up that gave me a sense that suggested if I didn't find the one right career that God had planned for me, I was wasting my life. This is not a sense of purpose, but the idolization of a job. God's purpose for each and every one of his children is quite clear and simple - to be conformed to the image of his Son. Your purpose, my purpose as a Christian is right there in the name, we are to become like Christ. And when we see those opportunities to grow in faithfulness, if we know what time it is, we take them.

I began this morning mentioning how distraction can make us lose our time. But there is a way in which purposeful action can also see us getting lost in time in a holy way. I do not know if you have ever experienced this, but there have been a few times in my life where I have been engaged in holy, meaning making, and beautiful work so fully that I completely lose track of time. I will miss lunch and not notice it. I will look at the clock and be shocked at how much time has gone by. Not all who wander, as

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<sup>4</sup> John 12: 23.



Tolkein says, are lost. Finding purposeful work can be like that, and it can also be like carrying a cross. We thank the Lord for both when we have a good sense of his timing.

I want to live a life that tells a good story. To do that, I need to know what time it is. I need to know that I live in a new covenant reality that hangs on the Good High Priest Jesus. I need to know that in this world I will fail and be called to repentance. I need to be still enough to know when my purpose calls me to work that makes me grow into the likeness of Jesus. I won't get the awareness of these things by looking at a device or a watch, but by being formed in the Scriptures, being formed in prayer.

We are approaching a holy time, the holy days of Holy Week. Don't let the demands of your 24 hour days deaden you to the reality of holy time. Take the opportunities you have; reach out, and see how God is inviting you to tell a better story. He makes all things new, yes, even us and his timing is perfect.