

What Time Did You Say?
L-5B-2009
Jeremiah 31:31-34; John 12:20-33
March 29, 2009

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt -- a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, ¹ says the LORD. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says 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. ³⁴ No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:31-34, NRS)

John 12: 20-33 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. ²⁷ "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say -- 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." ³⁰ Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people¹ to myself." ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. (John 12:20-33, NRS)

Finally, finally, Jesus says that "***the hour has come.***"

All through the past 3 years of his ministry, Jesus has said often to his followers that "***my hour has not yet***

come." In the reading from the Gospel of John today, however, Jesus dispels this hesitation and announces in essence that now is the time. Time, what time is it?

What did you say, Jesus? **What's** makes this **time** right?

Why now? What is going to happen at this time?

In his three years moving toward this time, Jesus has dropped more than enough hints about "*the hour that is to come.*" He suggested as much in John 2 when the wine steward remarked, when he discovered to his surprise that the best wine was still to be drunk. This new and better wine resulted from the mysterious transformation of the 6 large jars of plain water stored for cleaning water at the wedding feast in Cana. **John 2:9-10 ...the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and**

then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk." Then the steward makes this astute observation, "*But you have kept the good wine until now.*" In other words the sign of what is happening in Jesus, God made flesh, is that the best is yet to come! When is that time, you ask? It is not until God is ready, when the hour has come.

Now in our lesson today in chapter 12 of the Gospel of John, Jesus announces that the time has come. It is a sign of what is to come, the best that God will give to us to drink in with the heavenly feast that will be set before us. John gave many signs in the first twelve chapters of this about to happen - transformation. Through these signs of healing and miracles, we receive

different glimpses in seven separate signs of what this time of the coming of the Messiah means.

Here at the wedding feast, it was the first sign to reveal some vision to us of God's desire and capability to transform the worst into the best at the right time.

What time is best and right, we ask? Time is not a tyrant here, it is a gift. It is the Lord's time. Time is like a snap shot. Once we take the picture, this time is preserved and revealed over and over again. It is like my grandson's baby pictures and my granddaughter's birth pictures on my door. In some ways, these remembrances are full of joy each time we look at them and become engaged with them.

Death is like that. Crucifixion is like that. When we remember this powerful event, we will bring it to life

within us. When that time comes for us to look on and see Jesus, we must do it right then and there. Time is an invitation to be involved and connected. If we hesitate or delay or even push this invitation to the bottom of our priority list, then we may miss this moment with all of its sacred potential. I think about this often when some of my family goes shopping. One of my family likes to wait and wait until the time comes for the lowest price, usually under ten dollars. But, there are times when the search for just the right item at just the right time for the right place is a time of frustration. Returning to get that item and finding it already taken this is the penultimate of missing the window of time and the opportunity to take advantage.

God's time is kairos time. When it comes it comes filled with potential to transform this moment in history in our lives to something closer to what God intended. When this time comes, you will know the full force of grace. There is a story about John Wesley coming into a village in England and encountering a hostile crowd of hecklers and thugs. When he was about to be done in, John Wesley came face to face with one particular bully who had intended to hurt him. But, in this moment of encounter, Wesley looked at this man in a way that conveyed understanding, compassion and love. This bully found in that moment a time of transformation. He went from bully to rescuer and save Wesley from an angry crowd.

This was a *kairos* time. It was the time for the Lord to be revealed to this bully. When Wesley stopped resisting and yielded to the crowd, then there was a moment to change.

Sometimes, teachers call this a teachable moment. A teacher seizes an opportunity when the window in a child's mind opens up to learn. That is the time to act. It is the time for the student to learn; and he will learn something critical and important.

God's time is coming near. God's movement of history is colliding with the madness of human time where hurt and pain and violence have exacted all that could be taken from one man's soul. Jesus as the Son of Man encountered that time in Jerusalem outside the gates of respectability on that **human trash dump**, where

bodies were destroyed and discarded as human refuse.

But it is here and now that we know this time to have been **transformational**. Life would never be the same after that moment on Friday of Holy Week.

We must wonder how God can work with humanity in such shambles. Transformation is the key to this human puzzle and the unlocking of the door to enter the Kingdom of God to reveal the richness of new life.

Remember, that the word in John is **LIFE**. Jesus comes to give us abundant life, living water that quenches the thirst, bread that satisfies hunger, and power to live alive right now. This is the eternal life of the Kingdom of God made real for us who believe in Jesus. He is the way to this life. He is the truth about this life. He is **THE LIFE**.

In ancient days, the prophet, **Jeremiah**, revealed a promise of God. This is a promise to make a new covenant. It will be a covenant not like the Ten Commandments carved on stone. It will be a covenant relationship that is hewn upon the human heart forever.

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. (Jeremiah 31:33b, NRS)

Doesn't it make us wonder what it means to have this **sacred law** written upon our hearts? Does this mean that there is a distinctive difference between "head" religion and "heart" religion? In ancient times the heart was not the opposite of the head. It was not the center of love, nor the center of emotions - that was the "intestines!" The heart, rather, was thought to be the center of

intellect and values. And, the very basic value of God was how one comes to God. We might say, "*How can my heart be like yours, O Lord?*" This new law is not to be written on stone. It is to be etched on human hearts. Paul the Apostle talks about Christians being like a letter of recommendation written upon human hearts. The letters of this epistle are written by the Spirit of God upon our hearts to give witness of who Jesus is that lives as resurrected Lord within us. The world seeks to know God, even as the Greeks come to Philip in the Gospel of John wanting to see Jesus. But, when Philip and Andrew go to Jesus about this quest of the Greeks, he says that puzzling remark, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*" (John 12:22)

Comparing this glorification of Jesus Christ on the cross to a grain of wheat, Jesus tells everyone that he will have to suffer and die, just as a **grain of wheat** must go into the ground to die in order to produce much fruit.

A grain of wheat may live millennia. But it will not produce fruit until it is put in the ground. There it is transformed.

Jesus again calls us to give up our life in order to live alive in faith. Jesus must know that we are still trying to grasp and hold onto his life in its old destructive form. Therefore, Jesus shows us that he must die for there to be life. He cannot stay the way he is any more than we can, if we are to follow Jesus. He must go to the cross. In a similar manner, we cannot serve him unless in some way we share this **CROSS LIFE** also. Taking up the cross is the bottom line value of the

Christian faith - to become a servant, who dies to the old ways of a violent grasping world and rises to a new and transformed life of serving God in suffering love.

God's sacrifice in love becomes our invitation in the body of Christ to suffer also for the world. Blessed are those who are persecuted for my sake, Jesus said. Blessed are we that hunger and thirst for that sacred time of dying and living.

What time is that? It is now. Christ invites and comes to us NOW with the Cross-life. It is before us now. Now, not tomorrow, Life begins now. Life is being changed forever in this very moment. This God's time you and I and all of us in every age and in every land are looking upon the cross to save us and to heal us.

