

“It’s About Time”

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Isaiah 49:1-7

John 1:29-42

It was four o’clock in the afternoon when the two disciples of John saw Jesus and followed him to where he was staying. This is a pretty minor detail for John to include, and it made me wonder, “What’s the big deal about four o’clock?” Those of you who are into what the British tabloids have to say-- and with Megxit, they have lots to say-- might think it was tea time. In all John’s gospel talk about darkness and light, I found myself wondering whether it was a summer 4:00 when the sun is still high, or was it a winter 4:00, when light is much more ready to give way to darkness?

Preacher Karoline Lewis suggests that it’s not the hour that’s important, it’s *what happens* in that hour which makes the time important. For most of the significant moments of your life, you can remember pretty closely the hour of day it happened. People say things like, “I remember the specific moment he said that he loved me. I remember the exact moment she walked across the stage to accept her diploma. I remember the particular moment when I heard my diagnosis. I remember the precise moment when I heard about...”

Whether it was something as delightful as a first kiss, or traumatic as watching the planes collide into the World Trade Center, our bodies and minds make records of the times that change our lives.

While we were on vacation at the start of the New Year, I lost my watch. I did not lose it by misplacing it, which would make it any ordinary Thursday. No, I happened to be jumping off a natural, 5 meter-high cliff into sparkling waters below when the band of my watch unbuckled and sank to the sandy bottom of the salty river. I didn’t even notice at first, because Kai was right behind me, fearless, jumping into the water with much less hesitation than it took me to do so. It was only when I swam to the shore that I noticed the bareness of my wrist. I tried snorkeling to the bottom a few times, sweeping the sand with my hands, but besides a few tropical fish staring back at me, I didn’t find anything before my limits of breath had me rising to the surface for a gasp of air.

Since that happened, I have mostly gone without a watch. The watch I lost was a fancy watch for me; it was a smart watch, and so it not only told me the time, but it also sent me text messages, recorded my heart rate and minutes exercising, and nagged me when I sat at my desk for too long. And all that's helpful, especially since I've been trying to build practices in my life to help me be more physically active and healthy. But sometimes it gave me the sense that I was simply tracking time, but not being fully present in it. I have to admit, it has felt a little freeing not having my watch bound to me.

I had a professor in college who didn't believe in taking pictures, because he said fiddling with the camera took away from the ability to be fully present in the moment. I take too much joy in looking back at my pictures and reliving the moment to agree with him, but I can also see his point: you don't want the instrument used to record a moment to upstage or be more important than the moment itself.

For the two disciples-- it was Andrew, and either his brother Simon or another disciple-- they remembered it was four o'clock not because their watches or the village sundial told them; they remembered the time because **that is the moment their lives completely changed.**

"Where are you staying?" they asked him. ³⁹He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. (John 1:38b-39)

Within these 3 sentences, the verb "to stay, to remain" is used three times. In Greek, it is the word *meno*, TO ABIDE. "Used no less than forty-plus times in John it is the primary word to describe the intimate relationship into which Jesus invites us.

"To abide is to belong. To abide is to be saved (John 4:42). To abide is to be assured of a future with God (John 14:2). To abide is to feel a real and committed relationship (John 15:1-17). No wonder [they] remembered four o'clock in the afternoon." Can **you** remember a time when you abided with Jesus, or he with you?

I have spent the weekend doing lots of abiding, as we have been keeping vigil over my father-in-law as he passes from this life into the next. Knowing these are the moments that will be etched into Chris' mind forever, I am trying to to be fully present in time, with Chris and our family, on a weekend when we are reminded that time is precious and time is limited. It's the kind of time when the things we wish were in our control aren't, and the things we wish weren't in our control, are. Like my daughter tearfully begging God to let her Lolo live till her 8th birthday-- we wish that were in our control, but it isn't.

Or the decisions that will have to be made about when the many machines and tubes keeping him barely alive should be shut off-- we wish we did not have control over that time, but we do, and the decision is complicated by the unavailability of the palliative care team, which can provide support to make that transition off those machines peaceful and not traumatic for him or his family; we do not have control over the fact that weekends are their time off.

Here is what we do have control of: family being together for one another, and letting that be the top priority. When someone dies or is dying, it is okay to take off the watch and be in a different kind of time. Other responsibilities get second or third or fifth priority, which is why I cancelled the Officers' Retreat yesterday. We see this later at Jesus' death, when the disciples gather together in the Upper Room, or the women sit vigil at the garden tomb.

Martin Luther King, Jr. had a sense that his time was limited. He likely did not know that he would be shot at 6:01 pm Central Standard Time-- though for the people in the pews who were alive and in this country then, that time is probably etched in your memory. But by the time King had arrived in Memphis, Tennessee, to support the labor movement's striking workers, he had endured a porch bombing, many death threats, and had preached his own eulogy at Ebenezer Baptist Church. He'd told his parents to expect that he would have an early, and violent, death.

Still knowing this, he persevered, saying, "It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment," Martin Luther King said in his "I Have a Dream" speech, given before 250,000 people gathered on the National Mall. And so he continued his message.

"We've got some difficult days ahead," Dr King told the crowd in Memphis the day before he died.. "But it really doesn't matter to me now, because I've been to the mountain top, and I don't mind.

"Like anybody, I would like to live a long life - longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now.

"I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over and I've seen the Promised Land.

"I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land.

In the Greek language, time gets distinguished in two different ways. *Chronos* refers to time, as in minutes and seconds. It is four o'clock. It is (ask congregation what time it is now). But there's another kind of time: *Kairos*. King knew how significant time could be when a moment gets fleshed out by the Holy Spirit, and he found a way to be radically present in that moment in ways that drew others in as well.

The prophet Isaiah said, "The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he called my name." I suspect this is true of each of us. And there will be moments in our lifetime where we can live into the power of time, in order to meet the calling God has summoned in us.

The officers whom we will ordain and install, serving in roles of Elders and Deacon, will have to pay attention to time. They'll need to plan and attend meetings on the right time and date. They will need to fulfil their responsibilities on time, whether that means submitting budget sheets, or setting up communion on the dates we planned, or making sure they show up as Greeter on the months they commit to serve. But they also need to pay attention to the other kind of time, the *Kairos* time, when God calls them to live into the moment. That may be through showing up for a church member whose loved one is dying, or it may be helping the church respond to a mission need in the world that speaks to the calling of our congregation, or supporting a new generation of leadership in meaningful ways *before* they get burned out and drift away.

Will our church be a place where we have moments we will remember for the rest of our lives? Will there be moments when we can say we have met or we have followed Christ himself? Come, see, and abide with Christ. Amen.