

“Now is the Time”

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[Jonah 3, 1 Corinthians 7:29-31, and Mark 1:14-20](#)

Did you take typing classes in school? I imagine many of us did – some on manual typewriters, some on electric typewriters, and some on computers. When I was in school, typing classes weren’t offered until high school. By that point, I had been typing for many years, although I was using my own made-up typing method. When I got to my tenth grade typing class, I had to unlearn many old habits of typing. I remember sitting in the class, doing typing drills where we would type something as fast as we could without errors. There’s a sentence that is often used in such drills. It is “Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country.” Over and over, for decades now, typing students have typed “Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country.” Now is the time...

The three lessons we read today have that idea in common – “Now is the time.” They are all about urgency. Jonah was sent to Nineveh to preach to them, and his message was “Now is the time to repent.” Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, saying “Now is the time to get serious about God.” And Jesus called out to Simon and Andrew and James and John, saying “Now is the time to follow me.” *Now* is the time. Jonah tells the Ninevites, “In forty days, it’ll be too late.” Paul tells the Corinthians, “The appointed time has grown short.” And Mark tells us that after Jesus called the fishermen, “immediately they left their nets and followed.”

*Now. Immediately.* I’ve got to tell you that those are not my favorite words. Doing things immediately is sometimes not my strong suit. I’m asked to do something and I say, “sure!” and then hours or days later, I haven’t done what I said I would do. I’ve gotten several other tasks

done, but not yet *that* one. Sometimes I don't quite understand the urgency behind a particular request. "Oh, you meant *now*?"

It's the same way in the church, I think. God calls us to do something, and we put it off. God says, "Come and follow me." We say, "Sure, no problem." God comes back later and says, "I thought you were going to follow me." And we say, "Oh, you meant *now*?"

God says, "I want you to spread the good news" and we say, "Sure, no problem." Later, God returns and says, "well?" And we say, "Oh, you meant *now*?"

God has called us all to act. *Now is the time*, our three passages of scripture tell us today. We are called to pray, to witness, to share our resources. We are called to feed the poor, to clothe the naked, house the homeless, to heal the sick, to stand with the oppressed and suffering. And we say, "sure," but God has to keep coming back to us, reminding us, "Yes, I meant *now*!"

*Now is the time* for us to follow. Now is the time to fully commit ourselves to the Good News of Jesus Christ. *Now is the time!*

Mark tells us that Jesus called some fishermen to be disciples, and "immediately" they left their nets and followed him. It turns out that "immediately" is one of Mark's favorite words. It appears over forty times in Mark's gospel. After Jesus' baptism, the Spirit *immediately* drove him out in the wilderness. The first two disciples *immediately* followed Jesus, and then Jesus *immediately* called the next two. Jesus heals a leper and *immediately* the leprosy left him. Jesus heals a man who cannot walk, and he *immediately* picks up his mat and goes out. That's just the first five *immediatels* in Mark's Gospel. If you sit down and read through Mark's Gospel, you will quickly be out of breath. This happened, then that immediately happened, and then something else immediately happened. Jesus tries to get away from the crowds, but another crowd catches up to him. This immediacy tells us of the urgency of action. We should not delay, for, as Paul wrote, "The appointed time has grown short." And in our Gospel lesson today, Jesus says, "The time is fulfilled..."

This urgency is there throughout Mark's Gospel. As I mentioned last week when we talked about baptism, Mark doesn't record anything of the birth of Jesus. He starts right in with a little detail about John the Baptizer, and then *immediately* goes to the baptism of Jesus. Mark's sense of urgency makes his Gospel the shortest of the four, and that is because he leaves out all of the things he doesn't consider as important. The work of the Lord is too urgent to spend time on all of the other details, and so this immediacy shows up right there at the beginning of Mark's Gospel. We might think that it would appear as Jesus' death grew closer, but it's there throughout. It's almost like the saying popularized by the movie *Dead Poets Society*: Carpe Diem – seize the day. Jesus knows there is much work to be done for the kingdom, and so we should get at it immediately. As I said, I struggle with following that instruction. I often put off tasks that I'm concerned will be difficult or unpleasant, and then I spend my time dreading those tasks. It would be easier if I just went ahead and did them! All the more so, we should be about the work of the kingdom, *immediately*, for now is the time! Each day, each hour, each minute is a gift from God, and we should use them wisely. We should seize each moment and use it for God's purposes.

What would life look like if we did just that, if we lived with the same intensity that Mark describes? What if we had the same sense of urgency, the sense that "now is the time"? We often feel like today doesn't matter. There might be important days somewhere out there in the future, but today? Today is just any old day, and so it's not very important what we do with today. The lessons we read today interrupt our complacency, our wasting of this day, and say, "*Now* is the time!"

Is there something that you could be doing today for the kingdom of God, something that you might consider putting off until some time in the future? Why not do it today?

There's a story of a young man who, in a very hurried and excited voice, called an insurance agent and asked, "Can I insure my house?" The insurance agent said, "Why, of course, you can!"

We'll set up a time and I'll come out and look at your house." He said, "Can I do it over the telephone?" The insurance agent said, "No, I'm sorry. I'll have to come to your house first." The young man said, "Well, you better hurry up and get out here because this fire is about to destroy it!"

Some things must be done before it's too late! Jesus spoke with an urgency that told us the work of the kingdom is like that. We don't know why the disciples *immediately* got up from the boats and their nets and followed Jesus. It really seems like a foolish thing to do, doesn't it? If someone showed up at your place of work tomorrow and said, "Follow me," you'd be pretty crazy to leave your job behind and follow this person. But the person that called the disciples was no ordinary person. Maybe the fishermen just immediately recognized the divinity in Jesus when He called them, but it's also possible that there are some big details that Mark hasn't included in the story. There's no reason to say that this was definitely their first encounter with Jesus. Perhaps they had already heard him teach. Perhaps they had met with him about the possibility of joining him. Perhaps they had received some other sign from God. Maybe it was none of those, but something else that told these fishermen that this was what they were to do, so when Jesus called them, there was no reason to delay. If they had chosen to wait to respond to the call of Jesus, they just might have missed their chance.

We, too, are called by Jesus to certain actions. I can't say what that is for you. Discernment is a vital process for each of us. Pair scripture with prayer. In scripture, look for passages which resonate deeply with your soul, and seek confirmation in prayer. Seek counsel with wise friends or colleagues. Ask God to give you the guidance to know what you are to do and for the courage to step out in faith. Then, when called to do something, respond rather than procrastinate. We should not put off things until a more opportune time. We should be about the work of the kingdom right now, *immediately*, because "now is the time." Amen