

A Tick in Time

A Sermon by The Rev. Winston W. Welty

Epiphany 3B, Mark 1:14–20, 1/22/12

“After John was arrested...” I wonder if it’s possible for us to hear what’s behind those four poignant words. They speak of shattered dreams, abandoned hopes, and despair. John’s cry no longer rang out in the desert wastes. His star had faded; the once popular wilderness preacher had lost his crowds, stepped on the wrong political toes, and been jailed. He had said God was about to act, but Herod also acted, and John was snuffed out. The conquered people whose hopes he had raised now felt more conquered than ever, more abandoned by God. And if you’ve ever been angry at God; if you’ve ever wanted God to come through in a specific, certain way for you, and then seen it work exactly the opposite way, then these first four words were written *for* you, and could have been written *by* you. “After my child died...After my marriage ended...After a million people starved to death...After I got fired...After my hopes were shattered...” There are times for all of us when time itself seems like a waste of time, futile and empty. Each of us has known the feeling behind those words: ***“After John was arrested...”***

But suddenly everything changes, because

After John was arrested, JESUS CAME into Galilee (and to Lakeside), announcing God’s good news, saying, “NOW IS THE TIME!...”

He comes now as He came then, saying, “If your time’s empty, I can fill it up. You can continue to grieve about what might have been; you can complain because God

didn't follow your advice about how to run the universe; you can waste the time God's given you; *or* you can be part of what God's doing." The good time, the right time, the filled-up time, can be right now. Jesus speaks into the very midst of our tense, busy, vain, empty, wasted, despairing time, and says, "***Now is the time.***"

After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee (and to Lakeside), announcing God's good news, saying, "Now is the time! HERE COMES GOD'S KINGDOM!..."

And of course that's why the time suddenly is filled up, packed, pregnant with meaning. The waiting's over, because the time of God's ruling presence is present. Some day has become this day!

John's message had been that God would act *sometime*, so get *ready* for the action. *Jesus's* message is that God is acting in *this* time, so get *in* on the action! And wherever that message is heard it causes a crisis. In fact, that's the meaning of the word Jesus used for "time"; He didn't use the word *chronos*, meaning chronological time, wristwatch time; He used the word *kairos*, which means crisis-time. What kind of time is that?

Well, that's the kind of time it was for the Ninevites when Jonah told them that in 40 days they were toast; that time 40 days in the future reached back into their present time and changed everything—that's *kairos*—crisis time. It's the kind of time Paul was talking about when he was expecting Jesus' imminent return, the kind of time that changed every aspect of behavior—*kairos*—crisis time. It's the

kind of time that confronted Andrew and Simon and James and John when Jesus showed up and said, “Follow me”; everything in their family and professional lives was about to change, because it was *kairos*—crisis time.

That’s the kind of time it was Biblically, but we also know *kairos* time personally. The hospital orderly has washed you down, prepped you for surgery. You’ve been given the pre-op sedative. And then you hear the words that you’ve known were coming: “It’s time.” You’ve been living for weeks in anticipation of this moment. You’ve made adjustments in your life because of what’s coming in this moment. Your life’s already been changed because of this moment. It’s crisis-time—*kairos*—time that’s filled with meaning, time that affected you even before it arrived.

Or a student walks into class and the teacher says, “Because of a change in my schedule the final exam will be the day after tomorrow instead of the end of the semester.” Instant crisis! The day after tomorrow has just reached back into this day and changed this day, forcing you to ask some rather basic questions: what kind of a student have I been, what kind of a student am I now, and what kind of a student can I become in the next day-and-a-half? It really is time—*kairos*!

After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee (and to Lakeside), announcing God’s good news, saying, “The time is ripe, it’s crisis-time, because the ruling reign of God’s presence is present with us right now...”

And when that happens, time is changed. When we accept God’s future it begins to

condition our present. Suddenly our values and priorities and timetables are up for grabs. In Jesus, God acts to merge the future with the present. He bangs on the door of our present attitudes and institutions and calls us to become a part of His eternal activity, in such a way that our time now counts!

After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee (and to Lakeside), announcing God's good news, saying, 'The time is ripe with possibility, for God's future reign has dawned on you now; CHANGE YOUR HEARTS AND LIVES, AND TRUST THIS GOOD NEWS!'

Or, as most translations render it: REPENT! Which most people think means to feel terrible about yourself, and to run around saying "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry" until you've bored everybody to death with the litany of your particular personality defects. No! What it means is to turn around and walk in the direction of God's fulfilled time in the midst of our own empty times. To repent means to walk into your future, because in Christ the future has suddenly opened up to us.

A medieval knight needed a tall, strong horse to bear the weight of his armor. On that horse he was looked up to as being superior to the lowly peasant. That's where we get the expression, "Get off your high horse." And that's what repentance means: dismount, get off your high horse! He says to us, as He says to every Church, "Get off your high horse, St. Andrew's." So we're the biggest Church in our Diocese. So what? So what, unless in our life together we demonstrate to this community what it means to live God's future right now? So what,

unless in our life together we become a model of the future in these present moments?

A Rabbi was lecturing a group of Christian clergy about how much Christianity depends on its Jewish heritage. He got sort of worked up and finally exclaimed in frustration, “You people even took the Ten Commandments from us!” And one of the pastors said, “Well we may have taken them, but you certainly can’t accuse us of keeping them!” That’s right. And because we memorize but don’t repent; because we memorize instead of live the values of God’s Kingdom; because the Gospel is in our minds but not our hearts, in our minds but not on our lips, in our minds but not in our lives; because of all that there are millions who don’t yet know the incredible good news that the time is ripe for the future to be born among us! They’ll never know it just because we tell them; they’ll only know it if we show them.

After spending a day outdoors, did you ever find, on yourself or your child or your pet, that small, parasitic bug called a tick? To reproduce, the sightless female needs blood; so she’s directed to the tip of a twig on a bush by her photosensitive skin, and she waits there, through darkness and light, fair weather and foul, waiting for the moment that will fulfill the meaning of her life. How long can she wait? I Googled that yesterday, and I learned that some varieties can wait up to 584 days! But then I read that in a Zoological Institute in Germany, ticks were kept on

the ends of twigs, waiting, for 18 years. Eighteen years! On the end of a twig, waiting for the right time to arrive!

The signal she awaits is the scent of butyric acid, a substance in the sweat of all mammals. Nothing happens for weeks, months, years. It's the wrong time. But then one day, you walk by, and it's love at first smell. Time suddenly has meaning for the tick for the very first time! She hangs on as you brush by, buries herself in your flesh, and does to you what she is meant to do. And your time is suddenly different because a "tick in time" responded to the new time that had dawned in her life.

After John was arrested, Jesus came to Lakeside, announcing God's good news, saying, "The time has finally arrived, the waiting is over, because the presence of God is present right now in your midst; therefore—because of that good news—get off your high horse, jump off the end of your twig, and make a difference, right now!"