

## Now is the Time

Psalm 19, Mark 1:9-15

The First Church of Christ in Hartford

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Now is the time.

The kingdom of God has come near, within reach of your hands.

Repent. Turn around. Change your heart; change your life.

Believe in good news; see it; imagine it.

Now is the time; it doesn't have to be like it is.

The world God desires and designed is able to be grasped.

But we have to change many things.

Believe that it is possible; believe in the good.

Now is the time.

In Mark's gospel, that's how Jesus starts off his teaching. Quite frankly, his naivete is astounding. Did he actually believe that people were so dissatisfied with the way things were that they would be willing to make the changes he would go on to call for in his subsequent teaching? Sure, there are always those precious few who "hunger and thirst for righteousness," but he had to know that most of his listeners were actually hoping he was coming to do it **for** them, whatever "it" was. Heal them. Call down an army of angels to defeat Rome. Feed them. Isn't that what a Messiah is all about? His words calling them to make changes in their lives must have disappointed them. We hear about that sometimes: the rich man who turned aside from following Jesus because he just couldn't give up his money and his stuff. The religious leaders who just couldn't give up their power and control. Those who refused to forgive others who had harmed them.

But God bless him, Jesus really believed that we wanted a world such as God imagined this world could be. Jesus really believed we wanted a society where people placed the well-being of others as

equal to their own. A place, therefore, where people were at peace with one another, with everyone. A place where no one had to go hungry because resources were shared. A place where nationality or ethnicity or religious differences would not keep anyone from helping another person. A place where second chances abounded. A place where no one killed anyone for any reason. Oh, people would say they wanted this, and lift up this vision in prayers, but to really do what would be required to reach out and grasp this kingdom of God which was at hand, well, Jesus got fewer takers the more he painted the picture of what was required from us to enter into what would be paradise.

What's with that?

Why wouldn't every single person Jesus met want exactly that kind of world to live in? Why wouldn't they do everything in their power to make it so?

Why wouldn't we?

Why wouldn't we?

Probably for the same reasons now as in Jesus' time. All of us in one way or another put something in our lives above our desire for the kingdom of God. All of us do. Maybe it is wealth. Maybe it is some ideology or political belief. Maybe it is a country, an ethnicity, a race. Maybe it is power. Maybe it is family, that's a hard one. Maybe it is fear or anger. Maybe it is guns. Maybe it is a job, or the hope of a job. Maybe it is busyness. Something, probably some-things, there are in all our lives that keep us from doing all we can to reach out and grasp the kingdom of God which is so near, still.

Now is the time.

Every time we read these words of Jesus, which come again and again in the gospels one way or another, that "the time is at hand," or "the time is fulfilled," it's like he's saying it across millennia to us here.

One modern Bible paraphrase uses the words "Time's up!" here, now. And that picks up the sense of urgency Jesus tried to communicate.

Now is the time.

Some of you come from faith traditions where you were asked to "give up" something for Lent. An ancient practice which can have wonderful spiritual significance, but too often these days has devolved into a way to lose weight (giving up chocolate) or get rid of a bad habit (smoking, etc.). Jesus didn't say "give up," but what he said has bigger implications than chocolate or cigarettes or meat. "Repent" doesn't mean feel sorry for what you have done wrong or fix one little thing. It means literally, "turn around." Turn your life around. Get a whole new perspective. Change your life. Change whatever it is that is keeping you from coming together with God and other people to morph our world into the world God continues to hope this earth will be. Change your attitude and practices so that you are not putting any thing or any belief or practice above God. This is big stuff, not little stuff.

The Lenten practice to which I invite us is to give some time to seriously thinking about your place in God's world and what changes Jesus might call you to make, to do your part to help us all move toward the Kingdom of God. Don't just keep asking God to do stuff for you. Seriously think about what you might be called to do for God and for God's people and God's earth. With your bulletin there is an index card. If something smacked you right in the face when I was talking and you know the work you need to do, write it on the card and put it in this basket before you leave worship, lay it at the foot of the cross. But most of us will probably need to think about this. Take the card with you. Put it where it will interfere with your daily activities so you have to pay attention. Then bring it back here the next time you come and add it to the basket. Maybe you will need to write on another card and keep it in front of your face so you keep working on whatever you are called to do. 36 days left in Lent. Now is the time for a good start.

And remember as you think about this. After Jesus called people to repent, he said, "believe in the good news." If we think that making the changes will only result in loss, then there's no point. If we believe that the end result will be good news, not only for others but for ourselves, that changes everything. Jesus said, "I have come to give you life, life abundant!" Jesus said, "I tell you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be full!" Whatever it is we need to change is actually holding not only us, but others, back from full joy and abundant life! If we see that, then however difficult the changes are, we can move into them with confidence.

Now is the time.

The world as God imagines it is so close.

Change your life.

Believe in the good news. Amen.