

All in God's Time

Luke 1:68-79, Luke 3:1-6

Center Church

December 9, 2018

The Rev. Dr. Rochelle A. Stackhouse

What time is it? Yes, and also it is the second year of the Presidency of Donald Trump, when Dan Malloy is about to leave as governor and Ned Lamont will be governor of Connecticut, when Luke Bronin is Mayor of Hartford. It is the time when John Dorhauer is General Minister of the United Church of Christ, Kent Siladi is the Connecticut Conference Minister and Tamara Moreland is the Regional Minister, and Rochelle Stackhouse is the Transitional Minister of Center Church.

Where are we? Yes, and we are in the United States of America, on the continent of North America, on the planet Earth, in the Milky Way galaxy.

What time is it here today, and where are we? Yes, and today we are reaching back to the past time and to places far away. With Zechariah we are remembering the stories people passed down for generations and generations about how God moved in their lives in very specific times and places. Remembering times when God's mercy fell like rain on people who had lost their faith and turned to destructive ways. Remembering times when it seemed enemies would wipe out all that was good, and yet God moved and prophets arose and leaders led and spirits lifted. With our Jewish kin this week of Hanukkah, we remember when one specific group of people thought all was lost, and somehow a little lamp oil lasted 8 days instead of one! Remembering Abraham and Hagar and Sarah and the quirky prophet John the Baptist, and how they opened their lives to a powerful relationship with God that changed the world. Remembering a small country across two seas that has always been a place of holy encounters and human struggles, just like it is today. When we come here and listen, we take ourselves out of this time and place and become one with the past, the people, the places

of the stories. In that time, in those places, God moved in the lives of those people in ways of love and healing and mercy and hope and peace. These stories are the foundation of our faith.

So, what time is it? Yes, and it is also the future time, in this place and on the whole earth. Because when we come here, our spirits' eyes are opened to what can yet be. Not in dreams of wild or scary messengers like Dickens imagined in his story A Christmas Carol, but spurred by the old words to keep looking ahead. "By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high **will break** upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." I feel like I need to say that every morning. "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh **shall see** the saving power of God." We talk sometimes in the church about Advent being about the "now but not yet." We dwell today in the "not yet" glimpsed in shadows pregnant with light. Against all odds, trying to believe that this future may yet be realized, and yearning with all our hearts to be part of its creation. The time today is then and there and them.

What time is it? Yes, it is 11:15 on December 9, 2018. Where are we? In Hartford, Connecticut, USA at Center Church on Main St. and by Facebook in the homes of people near and far. We don't just dwell in the church and our homes, however, but, like Luke, we dwell in cities and towns, in political, economic, social and ecological realities. God moves in all these spheres of life, Luke reminds us, not just in stables or churches. God comes in Jesus to shake everything up, including the lives of specific people in specific times, but also to impact big domains. The words of the prophecies we heard today use plural nouns and pronouns. "to guide **our** feet into the way of peace." "And **all flesh** shall see the saving power of God." Both John and Jesus sought to change individual human hearts, and they also sought to change the systems of human societies, religious and secular. God is moving in the NOW of our lives in the same ways, calling us out in our time and place to move in the same direction in

all spheres of life. Imagine John the Baptist in front of us now! What would he be saying to us?

What time is it? Where are we? The magic of this place and time this morning is that we move through past and present and future. We move through space and geography. Worship is a great time machine, way back and way forward. It is all real. It is all now. God surrounds us with the cloud of witnesses past and present and opens us to see into the future for which God yearns and works.

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Yes, and God was, and is, and will be in all times and places, forgiving, loving, working, waiting on us to catch up. In the immortal words of the fictional character Gandalf, "All we have to do is decide what to do with the time given to us." Knowing, trusting, believing that God is here and now, let's figure it out. Amen