

“The Time is Still Now! The Place is Still Here!

NT: Mark 10:17-31

There is no better time than right now! There is no better place than right here!

Time is precious. *There is no time like the present and no present like time.*

The philosophy of time is complex for many people, as we can easily get caught up in the past or become fearful of the future. Therefore, our call today, our reminder today, right now, is to be in this moment.

Where we are is also precious. *There is no place like home. Home is where the heart is.*

The philosophy of location can also be complex, especially as we join the rat race of life and attempt daily to be in more places at one time than is realistic or possible.

Thoughts on time and place can be applied in all aspects of life, but what I am focused on here today is us as the church. As God’s church, the time is still now, and the place is still here.

Three years ago, I began a sermon by asking you what time it was and where you were? Naturally some looked at their watch and then looked around the sanctuary. I then stated that the only correct answer to the time is NOW and the only correct answer to the place is HERE. The goal of that message was to draw us into the intentional focus and calling God has for us as the church in that time and place. Inspired by the same text above, I stated:

- The time is now; to commit, to sacrifice, to sell out, to give, to follow.
- “I want to be where I am, when I am there.” This quote challenged me to be ready, fully commit, sacrifice, sell out, and give all I have wherever I am; at home with family, at work, at play.
- I then discussed that the history and tradition in the church calls for us to give 10% of what we make to the church as a gift back to God. This comes from Leviticus in the Torah, in which God calls for the people to make sacrifices before the Lord. We don’t practice the live sacrifices as they did, but we have carried on the charge to say if we make \$100,000 a year, we pledge to give God a minimum of \$10,000 back to God. When we do this, we are left with 90% to do with what we need to or like to. In giving to God first, we trust that God will continue to provide for us in all our needs. I continued to say that when it comes to our stewardship, we have been challenged to give to God what is right, not what is left. We have been challenged to make the first check we write be to the church and not simply give our pocket change (although

pocket change is welcome too). Some of us have a good handle on tithing and some us don't. I think we can all do better.

- With my feet barely wet after 2 years of ministry here, You may or may not remember me sharing that First Presbyterian was portrayed to me as a "Sleeping Giant." And I thought that on one hand, being a giant is a blessing. It means there is greatness to be experienced, respected, and celebrated. But on the other hand, I thought, there is no church of God's that should be sleeping or inactive. I said at that time and this place, if we are indeed a "sleeping giant," as some might suggest, I think it is time for us together to wake up and be the church God calls us to be.

As a way to begin waking up, I suggested we must have faith in God to provide and where we have been gifted, we must also give, invest, commit, and sell out, doing our part to meet God's call. Since the beginning of time, the hope and future of the church has rested on God's shoulders, and God has entrusted to people like you and me to faithfully care for the needs of the church. God in this time and in this place is active and faithful and we are called to share with God in God's mission and ministry.

Guess what? The time is still now and the place is still here. Make no mistake! God is still active and alive, calling us, at this time and in this place, to be active and alive. Many of the things I highlighted as an emphasis three years ago are still relevant and we must still keep our eye on the ball: to commit, sacrifice, sell out, give, and follow. As God's mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23), we must not ever believe we have arrived and completed fully the call in which we have been called in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 4).

The time is still now and the place is still here for us, together, to "Celebrate God's Grace, and Inspire the Next Generation for Christ." The time is still now and the place is still here for us, together, to worship joyfully, grow spiritually, love boldly, and serve faithfully. All that sounds great Peter, but how do we do that? Thank you for asking. Seven is the number of completion so I will offer 7 things:

1. Trust God- Proverbs 3:5-6

When we seek God in all and for all, our path will be made straight. Our path changes when we don't seek God. When we try to control our own destiny; when we rely on our own gifts and abilities and not the ones God has given us to use; when we choose to live and act in fear and not faith; our path becomes winding and confusing. The wisdom of Proverbs 3 emphasizes that we are to lean not on our own understanding. In all ways we are to acknowledge God, and God will make our paths straight. When we trust in God, we are able to embody the will of God more fully.

2. Praise- Psalms

Praise the Lord! We praise because God is worthy. It is where we have established the core of worship. God is worth our time and energy and honor and glory, because of who God is as creator and maker of the earth, as the one who pronounced all creation "Good", as light in the darkness, as the Lord and Savior and giver of salvation, as advocate and comforter, as healer, as deliverer and reconciler. God is worth our praise because of what God has done, is doing, and will continue to do in creating, planning, redeeming, sustaining, saving, loving, comforting, delivering, reconciling, and giving. Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good. God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good.

3. Rejoice. Pray. Give Thanks.- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

What we get when we rejoice, pray, and give thanks to God is the peace of God- "well-being"- guarding our hearts and minds. Who here has ever longed for peace in their life? Peace in our own life? Peace for a loved one? Peace for the world? It should not surprise you for me to say that God is the ultimate source of peace, and that God wants us to experience God's peace. God desires for us to all have well-being, which can only be found in God.

So, given the state of affairs in life, in which we all have something causing chaos and discontentment, the time is still now and the place is still here to rejoice, pray, and give thanks to God. Because when we do, the promise that the peace of God- not just a ceasing of war or violence but a well-being- will guard our hearts and minds. We will be empowered with this peace as God will be with us, keeping us, providing careful watch over us, protecting us, preserving us, and providing for us. The next time we are feeling overwhelmed and discontent, let us rejoice, pray, and give thanks to God.

4. Be in touch with God's Word and Keep it- Luke 11:28

Hearing and doing God's word are basis for blessedness. To keep in this passage means to guard and protect it, like a living being in your home that needs care and attention and follow through. We are not only to be hearers of God's word, we are to be doers of the word. (James 1:22) And it will be difficult for us to be doers of God's word and will if we aren't familiar with what God's word or will are. But when we do, because of God's goodness, we will be blessed.

5. Live our lives worthy of the calling to which we have been called- Ephesians 4

I take this to mean participate and invest. For this church this call includes worship, education, and outreach. It means worshipping God joyfully with praise, growing spiritually, loving others boldly and hospitably, and serving others faithfully. It means us being good stewards in our relationship with one another and with the inheritance of facilities and resources entrusted to us through the

generations. That is a pretty stock answer. More directly, to live a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called is for us to be gracious, loving, and forgiving. Why? Because God has given us grace, loved us, and forgiven us. Therefore, we, by the power of God in us, are able to be gracious, loving, and forgiving as well. In our humanity we may not always want to, but for God, we need to.

6. Do. Love. Walk.- Micah 6:8...

What does the Lord require of us? Do justice. Love Kindness. Walk humbly. We are to do justice according to God. This call is not for us to serve as judges, but a call to righteous (Godly) behavior toward others. We are to love kindness according to God. This call is to put kindness toward others above all else, because when you truly love something or someone as God does, that love becomes the most important thing. We are to walk humbly with God. This call is not about us, but about the power of God. We are nothing without God and therefore we are to act like it, giving God the glory for all we are, all we do, and all we have.

7. Go, Sell, Give, Follow- Mark 10, Widow's Mite

Think back to what Jesus told the man in our story for today. The man had claimed to keep all the commandments outlined in the law. Jesus prods further and says yeah, but you have lacked one thing: Go- Sell- Give- Follow. The key for the rich man, I think, is the charge to follow. I say that because to follow Christ fully includes the imperative to "Go!", the need to "Sell" off that which will hold you back, and the opportunity to "Give" generously to others so they too can have. It is not only our Christian responsibility to go, sell, give, and follow, but also our Christian privilege. For all we have is a gift from God. If we believe in that, then we are to go, sell, give, and follow so God can continue to recycle and reuse by renewing and restoring the work of God's mission and will for the church. By going, selling, giving, and following Christ now, to God's church, you are participating and investing into the good news of God active and alive today.

One of the underlying messages of this story in Mark is that eternal life is not just something of a destination we work our whole lives to earn. Eternal life is not like a house or a car or a dream retirement. As God is an active part of our life, we are able to live the good news of God's eternal life now. Because God is active now, God's blessings are active now. God's love is alive now. God's grace is alive now. God's peace is a blessing now. To experience God now, is to experience eternal life now. To experience these things is worth our investment to go, sell, give, and follow now.

To give now is to invest into the eternal life you are invited to live now. Your investment gets added to the investment of another and together they are multiplied for the glory of God. One of the hardest caveats to investing with God, for us at least in today's culture I think, is that we are not to give based on our life circumstances or conditions. We are to go, sell, give, and follow out of our gratitude to the greatness of God. Like the widow who humbly gave her two mites, a representation of her all, despite what is going on in our life, God is always great.

Augustine once prayed, "Give me the grace to do as you command, and command me to do what you will." Brothers and sisters in Christ, the time is still now, and the place is still here. God is still calling for us. We are still being summoned for the purposes of God's Kingdom. Will you trust? Will you praise? Will you rejoice, pray, and give thanks? Will you be in tune and keep God's word? Will you live your life worthy of the calling to which you have been called-to be gracious, loving, and forgiving? Will you do, love, walk? Will you go, sell, give, and follow?

Let all God's people say... Amen.