

Sermon Draft

Text: Matthew 11:2-15

Sermon: It's Time

There was a joke that came out of the Soviet Union many years ago about a Russian who stood on the street corner in Moscow, and shouted, "Down with Khrushchev!" He was arrested and sent to prison camp for ten years. While he was in prison he had a change of heart, and came to see that Khrushchev was a great leader after all. The only problem was, while he was in prison the times changed, and Khrushchev was deposed from office and publicly denounced.

When the man was released, he went back to that same street corner in Moscow. He wanted to give a public testimony to his rehabilitation. This time he shouted, "Hooray for Khrushchev!" and got ten more years. Which just shows you, timing is everything.

That's what we learn from the Bible. Look at our lesson for this morning. The disciples of John the Baptist come to Jesus, and ask, "**Are you the one, or do we look for another?**" It is a critical question for John. John has preached that the time has come. The Messiah, he said, is about to appear, so repent, get ready, put your lives in order. He has devoted his whole life to the belief that the time has come. But he is in prison now. He is about to lose his head. So he sends his disciples to ask Jesus, "**Are you the one that we have been waiting for, or do we still look for somebody else?**"

It is a wonderful illustration of the way the Bible looks upon time. For the Bible, there are only two kinds of time: there is the time of preparation, and there is the time of fulfillment.

There is a time of expectation, a time of waiting, when we look forward to our dreams being realized. Then there is a time of fulfillment when what we have hoped for, what we have prayed for, appears.

When that happens, the Bible calls it the "fullness of time." The Christmas story is a wonderful example of the "fullness of time." Have you ever wondered why it happened the way that it did?

Why God came to us in Jesus, not somebody else? Why it happened then, and not some other time? Why it happened in Bethlehem, and not in Rome? The answer that the Bible gives is, the time was right. As we look back on it we see all these things falling into place. We see indeed; the time was right.

It was at that time that three great civilizations converged. There was the Roman civilization. The Romans built roads, the purpose of which was to make communication possible throughout the empire, to make commerce easier, and especially to make it easier for the Roman armies to move quickly throughout the empire. Roman roads were marvels of engineering. Some of the roads and bridges are still there today.

But a hundred years before Jesus there were no Roman roads. And then they were there. One hundred years before Palestine was an isolated, backwater country nobody paid any attention to, or was interested in. By the time of Jesus, Palestine was tied to the web of nations in the Roman Empire. Roman roads made it possible for the Christian missionaries to fulfill the command of our Lord to go out into all the world and preach the gospel.

The second civilization was the Greek civilization. It provided a universal language. Three hundred years before Jesus, Alexander the Great conquered the world. The Greeks followed him with a kind of missionary zeal to spread Greek culture, and especially the Greek language. By Jesus' time, Greek was the universal language of the Mediterranean world, which made it possible for a new kind of communication in the world that did not exist before that time. People could speak the same language. And during that period, three hundred years before Jesus, the Old Testament was translated into Greek because more Jews could speak Greek than could speak Hebrew. It was the universal language.

Alexander the Great founded the city of Alexandria, which became the intellectual center of the world. The greatest library in the ancient world was at Alexandria.

For the first time, Jew and Greek, Egyptian and Roman, all spoke the same language, shared the same culture, and they all became familiar with one another's traditional cultures.

The third great civilization was the Jewish civilization. The contribution of the Jews was to see history as moving toward a goal that they called the Kingdom of God. History had a purpose, it wasn't just one thing after another, but it was going someplace. Someday the world is going to be the way God wants it to be. That's the vision Isaiah shared with us this morning. Each week in Advent we read these beautiful visions of what the world will be in the future.

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom. ...Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God will come...and save you. The eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped...the lame shall leap like a deer...the tongue of the speechless shall sing.

Wonderful visions. The prophets preached that to all the people. ***"Lift up your heads, your redemption draws nigh."***

Don't focus only on the present and its misery and despair. Look to the future, because the future holds possibility. When the time is right, in the "fullness of time," God will act to save you. That's what happened on that first Christmas.

So we look for a time of peace, when enemies shall be reconciled, and people who are estranged will embrace in reunion. Swords will be beaten into plowshares, and spears into pruning hooks, and a baby will be born who will do all of this.

He will be like light coming into the darkness of our world, and the darkness of the world won't overcome him. The Jews called this savior "the Messiah." The Greeks called him "the Christ."

That was the preparation, the time of waiting. It took hundreds of years until these three civilizations converged in a little corner of the world called Palestine: Jewish, Greek and Roman. Then it was time. And the time was fulfilled.

In our text for this morning John is in prison for messing with the king. He is going to lose his head. So he sends his disciples to ask Jesus, "***Are you the one, or do we look for another?***" Now remember John had already met Jesus, back at the beginning of His ministry down at the river. What happened? What's going on? Why the doubt? At one time he knew, and now he is not so sure.

Jesus says to John's disciples, "**Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me.**"

The evidence that Jesus gives to the disciples of John is what the prophets said would happen when the Kingdom comes. Go tell John that all the signs point to this as the time, the time is here. The time of preparation had passed and the time of fulfillment was at hand. The promised Messiah had come and He will return again.

You and I are once again waiting and preparing for Christ to return but while we wait God is at work in our lives. The Bible says, we are in a time of preparation, a time of waiting, when God is at work.

Hugh Redwood was a British journalist. He described a time when he was under a terrific strain and pressure because of terrible decisions that he had to make. He didn't want to make them. He didn't know which way to turn. One day he was invited to give a speech in another town. His host arranged a little reception before the event in his house so that he could meet some people. During the reception the host said, "You look weary and tired. Would you like to escape from all of this chatter and be by yourself?" He said, "Yes."

He was taken upstairs to a sitting room, where there was a fire in the fireplace and an easy chair pulled up to the fire. He sat down. Then he noticed at his elbow a little table next to the chair, with a Bible opened to the 59th psalm, where there is a verse that reads, in the King James version, "***The God of my mercy shall prevent me...***"

In the old King James English, "prevent" means "go before."
Hugh Redwood said that somebody had written in the margin
after that verse this paraphrase: "My God in his loving kindness
shall meet me at every corner."

Redwood said that was like light shining in the darkness of
his life, and he was encouraged to go on, confident that God is at
work, preveniently, even when we are not aware of it. Which is
why we are asked to wait, be patient, have hope. Because there
are only two kinds of time: the time of preparation, and the time
of fulfillment.

Amen