

January 22, 2012

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Mark 1:14-20

“What time is it?”

I considered asking you to raise your hands in response to some opening questions today, but I have, if not totally cold, definitely cooling feet.

Here are the questions. (You do not have to answer them, but may wish to do so, just in your own mind and heart.)

Have you experienced life changing, moving, powerfully spiritual experiences in church?

Have you experienced life changing, moving, powerfully spiritual experiences outside-- in nature?

If I had asked for a show of hands on those, I think it highly possible that many more hands would have been raised when I called for deeply spiritual experiences in nature—OUTSIDE the church building.

This fascinates me—for the following reason: We LIKE to be together here at church, to do things we love doing here, to shape our ministries in ways that WE decide, in ways that make US comfortable, that meet OUR needs etc.

Then we talk about how we need to GET MORE PEOPLE in here- INSIDE the church. We want to GET MORE PEOPLE just like us! Who love to be with people like us- who love to do the things WE love to do, to make us feel even MORE comfortable. We want people that help meet OUR needs. And, if we're honest, we want more people here, INSIDE the church, to HELP PAY FOR OUR MINISTRIES, OUR STAFF, OUR BUILDING NEEDS and so forth.

We also, sincerely, believe this church community has blessed and does bless our lives—so we do think others might want to join us, because we hope they will be blessed also.

But we aren't too involved in being OUTSIDE the church, whether in nature, being touched by God's grace, or in movement TOWARDS the world, to bring Christ OUT THERE to THEM! We just want to call folks to COME HERE and JOIN US INSIDE.

What time is it? Well, today, right now, it's time for us to worship God. What time is it? It's the Sunday our Lectionary calls us to read the texts we've heard this morning. What time is it? It's time to seek the messages and meanings that come from these Bible passages.

What time is it? In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul seems to be saying, "It's time to deny or leave behind the world. Suspend all your normal activity as you prepare for Christ's return." Mark's gospel seems to be saying, "Its time to leave behind your ordinary work, even family members, even your father" (as James and John did, leaving Zebedee behind in the boat.) What time is it? It's time to go and follow Jesus.

The church tends to lock Jesus outside the church. He's standing outside the doors, calling just as he called to the disciples. He's asking us to come on out. He's calling, "Come, follow me, I will make you fish for people."

There's a story that circulates, about a church member who was branded a sinner, excommunicated and forbidden to enter church. He took his problem to the Lord in prayer: "They won't let me in, Lord, because I am a sinner." "Well, don't feel so bad," said Jesus, "They won't let me in, either. And I can't even get them out here to follow me!"

I think we can look at it the opposite way, and it's still true. (Our faith often embraces paradox.)The church locks Jesus INSIDE the church. We try to keep him here, kind of like a precious little pet of some kind. He's here loving and helping us, but that's where we want things to stop. We like him loving and helping us. We don't really want him to COMMAND us to do things we don't like. We don't want him to grab us by the hand, dragging us out of the church to talk about him to other people. We don't want him to grab us and drag us out of the church into places we don't feel comfortable.

What time is it? It's time to follow Jesus. Let's think a moment about Paul's words in the epistle. He is not calling us to leave the world, actually. We're called to live in this world, but to do nothing "as though" it is an ultimate end in itself. Our buying and selling are not of ultimate value. (And THAT is

absolutely counter-cultural across our world today.) Our focus on family is not to be our highest loyalty. God must be more important to us than anything else. When God is most important in value to us, we will do everything living entails, but we won't try to give those things the **BURDEN OF PROVIDING ULTIMATE MEANING FOR OUR LIVES.**

When Jesus called to the disciples, inviting them to “Follow me,” it was an invitation that enticed them **OUT** of their familiar world, **OUT** of the fishing boat, **AWAY** from their father, and **INTO** a world full of problems and possibilities.

What time is it? It's time to follow Jesus. It is always and everywhere time to follow Jesus. The church is not a place, but a movement. It is always and everywhere time to put God first in our loyalties.

Jesus asks us today, “Will you follow me?” He asks us as individuals, but he also asks us as a community of faith as well, as a **CHURCH.** We hem and haw and focus on committee work, on discussions about the Bible, on our worship services (and I am not saying those things aren't important; I'm not saying those things don't have value)—rather than answering Jesus' question. It's really a question of **WHO WILL BE THE BOSS OF OUR LIVES, WHO WILL BE THE BOSS OF THIS CHURCH.**

Jesus asks, “Will you follow me?” A pastor was flying home after a speaking engagement. During the flight an attendant stopped by his seat and asked if he would like dinner. “What are my choices?” he asked the attendant. She smiled and replied, “Yes or no.”

What time is it? Time to follow Jesus. Jesus asks us, “Will you follow me?” The reply choices are “yes” or “no”.

Tom Seaver, the legendary baseball pitcher, once asked Yogi Berra, “What time is it?” Yogi replied, “You mean now?” What time is it? Time to follow Jesus. “Will you follow me?” Jesus asks. The answer choices are “yes” and “no” and the time to do this is “now”. What time is it? It's **NOW.**

I am not a student of world religions. I have only a simple understanding of non-Christian faiths. But it seems to me that a number of them call people to pull back from the world—to move higher or beyond the everyday world in various ways. One of the reasons I cherish the Christian faith is because it

calls us INTO the world. It calls us to move TOWARDS those in pain and suffering. The greatest example of that is given in Jesus Christ. God HIMSELF came into the world—he came in the flesh in Jesus.

The world is a place created by God and cherished by God. The physical world is inhabited by God. As we considered last week, God does not call us to disdain the physical, to be at war with our bodies, but he calls us to view them as sacred, as holy. God inhabits the physical world; God dwells within his flawed and broken people. And Jesus calls us to follow him into the flawed and broken world. The answer choices are “yes” and “no”. The time to do this is “now”.

My husband, Gilles, and I have been married 41 years. In all those years the longest we ever remained at the same address is a period of 7 years. I have a daughter who told me, when she was in high school, “Mother, I am NEVER doing this to MY children- making them change schools and move over and over again!” You should know that she did live in three different places and attend three different schools in her 6th, 7th and 8th grade years. That particular daughter moved into a beautiful home with her husband and two little boys last May. She informed me that she intends to remain there until they carry her out feet first to the funeral home. Another daughter, who went to three different schools in 9th, 10th and 11th grades, told me after her freshman year of college, “Mother, it’s like I’m HOMELESS.” She had to come home for the summer, help us move to a new town and parsonage, all while maintaining a summer job in the town we were leaving. Loving church members housed her that summer.

Now, we are not to be jealous of others as Christians, but when I read the following story, I have to confess, I felt a few pangs.

Hal Brady, a United Methodist pastor in the south, once brought his family all together to give them some new, yet familiar, news- the bishop was moving them from First United Methodist Church of Alpharetta, Georgia, to First United Methodist Church of Carrollton, Georgia. Concerned about the impact this move might have on his kids, Brady asked how they all felt about it. The youngest child, Jason, responded with enthusiasm, “Dad, I was born to move!”

Friends, we were born to move. Jesus is calling. “Will you follow me?” he asks us. The answer choices are “yes” and “no”. What time is it? The time is “now”.