

# The Time Is Now

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**Mark 1:14-20**

When the end of the game is near, when time is running out, when the clock is ticking down, every move matters.

I'm a fickle football fan. Some years I devotedly follow the Bills. Some years, like the last few, my interest not only wanes, it drops precipitously. However, if there's something on the line – like the playoffs, I go from disinterest to rapt attention in short order, and I even care about the outcome!

That was the case this year. You all know the story. The Bills actually had a chance to end their playoff drought. On New Year's Eve, they won their final regular season game, and now all they needed was a win by Cincinnati to make happen. So there I was with my dearly beloved Brad and my esteemed colleague Mary Ann, glued to the TV screen, suddenly caring not just about the Bills, but also the Bengals!

Less than a minute left, Cincinnati was down by three and it was 4<sup>th</sup> and 12. This was it – now or never. I watched it in resignation, knowing in my heart of hearts that this would end in disappointment. But I watched anyway. And then, at the decisive moment – you're reliving this with me, aren't you – Andy Dalton hit his man. I leapt out of my chair and let out a yell of disbelief as the Bengals came through.

Fast forward two weeks to the Vikings/Saints game. I once lived in Minneapolis, it's one of my favorite cities, and I have family there – so of course, suddenly I cared about the outcome of *this* game! 10 seconds left, final play of the game, Vikings down by 1, 61 impossible yards to the end zone. I watched this one in resignation, too.

And then the Minnesota Miracle happened – all because some players kept their wits about them enough to recognize that this could be the decisive moment that would change the outcome.

When it's all on the line, you become alive in a way you're not at any other time. In sports, in competitions, in job interviews, in business decisions, every time you stand up and fight for something bigger than yourself, every time failure is knocking at your door, every crisis, every big moment in life, when everything is on the line – you feel it in every nerve ending from the top of your head to the tips of your toes. You know the time is now to respond, to get going, to act.

This is very much the sense we get in the Gospel of Mark. Mark's is a story that's very much in a hurry. If you're the type that likes to linger for a while, to savor elaborate, poetic phrases, to feast on a story filled with scrumptious details, then you're out of luck with Mark. This gospel is in such a hurry, that it contains no birth story of Jesus. In the time it takes Matthew to list the genealogy of Jesus before his birth, Mark has already gotten Jesus all grown up, had him baptized, sent him into the wilderness to be tempted for forty days, launched him into his public ministry, and alarmed the authorities enough to arrest John the Baptist and throw him into prison.

And in today's good news episode, everything happens immediately, immediately, immediately. Immediately Simon and Andrew leave their nets to follow him. Immediately Jesus calls James and John, they leave their nets, and off they go.

It seems to me that speed resonates with life today. How many of us have said our children grow up so fast? How many of us have seen a child get on the bus for kindergarten one day, and the next you're packing up the van to move them to their own apartment?

How many of us rush from one thing to another to manage all the demands on our time? How many of us are juggling schedules like crazy to make it all work? How many of us are instantaneously responding to floods of texts and emails, and expect everyone else to do the same?

I was speaking the other day with a communications professional about the lightning speed of change that social media and technology have brought in just the past five years – and how much catch-up work the church has to do to connect with youth and young adults in this reality. My one small consolation was that she said businesses are also reeling from such rapid shifts; they haven't caught up, either. Nice to know we're not alone!

Yet if we want to meet young people where they're at, if we're serious about sharing our Good News stories in ways that all generations are able to receive, then perhaps we might pay attention, and get ready to pick up the pace and respond nimbly where we're called, just like in Mark's Gospel.

His account of Jesus hurries along so fast, with especially sparse language. However, let's not mistake brevity for lack of depth and meaning; its rapid pace is part and parcel of the story. Ted A. Smith likens it to an alarm clock, persistently declaring the time and demanding some response.<sup>1</sup>

It's so swift, in fact, that it's easy to jump right to the fishermen with their nets and totally miss the decisive moment Jesus announces, even though it's right there for all to hear: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near."

It's not just any old time. It's *Kairos* time – the right time, the opportune time, the decisive time, God's time. It suggests that God's time is completed, brought to perfection, filled to overflowing, beyond all expectation. "And yet," notes Elton Brown, "the gospel story is just beginning."<sup>2</sup> As Karl Barth said, "the mission of the Son actually brings the fullness of time with it, and not vice versa."<sup>3</sup>

The time is fulfilled and God's kingdom is present. Now. In Galilee – "the place where most of us live," writes Scott Hoezee. "Most of us live in the Galilees of the world...in those places where the powers-that-be do not visit and that they do not know much about more often than not."<sup>4</sup> These are, says David Lose, settings of "disappointment, betrayal, violence, and apparent failure. Not what anyone expected."<sup>5</sup>

The time is now. Have you noticed that theme running through our own Galilean headlines? If you watched the Golden Globe Awards during the week between Andy Dalton's gift to the Bills and the Minnesota Miracle, you saw lots of celebrities wearing black and adorned with pins that said "Time's Up." Women in entertainment who are standing up against mistreatment of women in the workplace have called this the Time's Up movement. "The clock has run out on sexual

<sup>1</sup> Ted A. Smith, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 1*.

<sup>2</sup> Elton Brown, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 1*.

<sup>3</sup> Cited by Donald McKim, *Feasting on the Gospels: Mark*.

<sup>4</sup> Scott Hoezee, [http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/epiphany-3b-2/?type=the\\_lectionary\\_gospel](http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/epiphany-3b-2/?type=the_lectionary_gospel).

<sup>5</sup> David Lose, <http://www.davidlose.net/2018/01/epiphany-3-b-fullness-where-we-least-expect-it/>

assault, harassment and inequality in the workplace,” they say. “It’s time to do something about it.”<sup>6</sup>

Yesterday, I listened to an interview with organizers of the Women’s March. “The time is now,” they said, to give every woman a voice, and a vote, and the power to live a life free of oppressive structural barriers. Women from Third Church – who call themselves “per-sisters,” marched at Seneca Falls yesterday to add their voices, to say “Now’s the time.”

In her powerful “Me, Too” statement in court on Friday, gymnast Aly Raisman said to the world and to the one who abused her, “Now is the time” find out what went wrong and how it can be avoided. “Abusers, your time is up,” she said.

I get opportunities all the time to connect with social justice activists around Rochester – to tackle the systemic effects of racism and poverty on housing and education and economic opportunity. And the question I keep hearing is, “Where is the community outrage?” The system we have right now is perfectly designed to get the results we’re getting right now. It’s time for a radical reorientation towards justice for our segregated community.

In our own Galilee, this doesn’t really feel like the kingdom of God is near, just as I imagine the four fishermen felt in ancient Galilee. Yet the Gospel tradition that forms our faith says it is indeed. Wherever Jesus goes and his disciples follow him, the kingdom of God *is* near.

On Tuesday evening, the Session and the Deacons of this church met jointly, as they do once a year. Katie Orem led us in a discussion of an article with predictions about the future church. At my table group, much of the conversation was about what that means when we are rushing around to meet the many demands on our time. At a very practical level, how do we follow the urgent mission of Jesus when we have a job to get to, another after-school practice, another doctor’s appointment, another family obligation, another crisis to attend to? It’s daunting, if not downright impossible.

When all else fails, it’s always good to go back to the Gospel to get our grounding. Ted Smith clarifies what Mark is saying: “***In calling the Galilean fishermen to discipleship, Jesus does not just ask them to add one more task to their busy lives. He calls them into new ways of being...a new identity.***” When Jesus tells Simon, and Andrew, and James, and John, “Follow me,” he doesn’t mean I will make you fish for people, as if it’s another task to be done. He means, “I will make you to become fishers of people.” In other words, I will give you a whole new identity, so that when you follow me, everything you do will flow out from who I have made you to be.<sup>7</sup>

I suppose it’s kind of like muscle memory, or a reflexive response. When the time to respond is now, we can, by living out who we already are as followers of Jesus.

I grew up on music by Chicago. Many of a certain generation will recognize the lyrics I’m about to quote. Listen to them in the light of the Gospel story:

As I was walking down the street one day  
A man came up to me and asked me what the time was  
that was on my watch, yeah  
And I said:

Does anybody really know what time it is?  
Does anybody really care?

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.timesupnow.com/>

<sup>7</sup> Ted A. Smith, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 1.*

If so I can't imagine why  
We've all got time enough to cry

And I was walking down the street one day  
Being pushed and shoved by people trying to beat the clock, oh, no I just don't know  
I don't know  
And I said, yes I said

Does anybody really know what time it is  
Does anybody really care?<sup>8</sup>

Scripture's answer is yes. Jesus knows and has told us. The time is now. It is fulfilled. The kingdom of God has already broken through.

Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Excerpts from *Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?* Songwriter: Robert William Lamm