

# TIME TO DO WHATEVER JESUS TELLS YOU

Sermon, January 16, 2022

Texts: (Isaiah 62:1-5), Ecclesiastes 3:1-14, John 2:1-11

When I was a ninth grader, the popular rock band Chicago (*whose full name was the Chicago Transit Authority*) hit the top of the charts with the song, "Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?" Some of you may know it; it's a song about people who all have watches, but don't really know the time. "... a pret-ty lady looked at me and said her diamond watch had stopped cold dea-e-ad, and I sa-a-id, 'Does anybody really know what time it is? Does anybody really care? And so I can't imagine why, we've all got time enough to cry ...'" This song comes humming out of my subconscious just about every time I read this classic passage from Ecclesiastes. "For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die ... a time to weep and a time to laugh ... a time to mourn and a time to dance." And, as implied by the sermon title, it's ALWAYS time to do whatever Jesus tells you. Which, by the way, is pretty much the summary of my whole sermon, so I could just stop now ... but, I won't.

Ecclesiastes, Proverbs and Job belong to a genre of the Old Testament known as the Wisdom Literature. The writer of Ecclesiastes paid close attention to life as he drew his inspired insights for understanding it. And perhaps no insight is more profound than his notion of time. The teacher asserts in so many words that time comes to us only in the moment, the "season," we have. Each present moment is potentially holy because it comes from God Who can fill that moment with sacred meaning. The teacher would warn us, "Don't miss the present tense, which is the only one you have! Yesterday is gone, tomorrow does not exist, and all we really have is the present ... so live it and use it well!" Life comes to us in the **present**. Don't miss it because you are afraid of the present, or because you're fretting about yesterday, or because you're too preoccupied with tomorrow, like those Chicago song lyrics "... people trying to beat clock for oh I don't know, I don't know, I don't know-oh, and I said ..."

Some seasons of life are forced upon us; we do not choose them. No one in their right mind would choose, say, the time to die, the time to weep, the time to mourn. Let me state the obvious, that no one in my family would have chosen for my aunt to come to "the time to die" Christmas Eve. For that matter, no one chooses their time to be born; none of us in this room had very much to do with our individual births. We are just not in control of all our seasons. God alone is sovereign, and God's ways can never be fully understood by us ... which, by the way, is something of a recurring theme in the Wisdom Literature. We just don't always know why things happen when and/or how they happen; our finite minds cannot fully grasp the infinite workings of a sovereign God. No one gets to avoid the wintry season of mourning. Sooner or later it comes for us all. We don't choose it.

However, some seasons of life we DO get to choose. "There is a time to mourn and a time to dance," the text says. We may not get to choose when we mourn, but we DO get to choose when it is time to get up and dance again. "There is a time to weep and a time to laugh." Yes, things do happen beyond our control that make us weep, but we can choose when it is time to laugh again. "There is a time to love and a time to hate." This one is a bit tricky, because on one hand, we *do* choose to love. More often than not, love is an act of the will, or else it could not be something commanded for us to do. We choose to do loving actions, we choose by an act of the will to honor our promises to love, whether we "feel" like it or not. On the other hand, though, love is something that sort of happens to us beyond our control. We *fall* in love. It isn't something we can always put in our strategic plans ("I'll put it on my calendar to fall in love next Tuesday and get married in June."). So we don't really always choose the "season" of love, although love, ultimately, IS an act of the will. Hate is a choice, as well, although we can't always control what causes us to hate. And yes, there IS a time to hate; there are things truly decent people really should choose to hate (*which is almost another sermon*). But we can choose to control our hate by channeling it for constructive, not destructive, purposes.

I could go on all morning with this chapter, but I just want to hit on this point. Many seasons of life are thrust upon us with no choice of our own. But by God's grace we still have the freedom to make our own choices about our *responses* to the present season. We can choose to live into the season we have been given, and look for the potential holiness that can be found in all moments. We can choose not to be victims when bad things are thrust upon us. In the words of Simone Weil, "Victimization is a waste of suffering." Suffering can make us *bitter*, or it can make us *better*... if we choose to seek for the gracious presence of God, Who has made everything ... EVERYTHING ... beautiful, *in its time*. Joy is found not in controlling life, which the teacher calls a vanity and an illusion. Joy is found in our **response** to life, which is the one thing we can control. It's the old "10-90 Principle:" 10% of life is made up of what happens to you; 90% of life is decided by how you react. We really have no control over the 10% that happens to us. But we do have a measure of control over how we will respond, and how we respond has a profound effect over everything else that follows.

One more quick thing: Just about every time the teacher describes joy, he doesn't talk about it being found only in great achievements or accomplished goals; all of that he considers to be chasing the wind. Instead, he depicts joy with the most common things like eating, laughing, dancing, and loving. Those are all things we do in

the present tense, things we often do communally, together; things that are endowed with more holiness than we can see. Eating, laughing, dancing, loving — all things that were going on at a small wedding in Cana where the guests didn't realize that God was literally present right there with them, in the midst of their present moment.

We confess in the Apostles' Creed, "*On the third day He ...*" what? "*He rose again from the dead.*" Which is a remarkable tenet of our faith. However, according to John 2:1, on the third day He ... went to a wedding! In the way John has constructed his Gospel, on the third day of Jesus' public ministry He chooses to show up with His disciples at a wedding. Jesus doesn't go to the power center in Jerusalem to launch His ministry; He goes to a little ordinary, backwater town in Israel to a wedding celebration, a place where there is eating, and drinking, and dancing, a place where people are enjoying each other's company and celebrating a man and a woman who are pledging themselves to "Beulah Land". All these things were going on at this wedding in Cana where, again, the guests didn't realize that God was right there with them, in the midst of their present moment, entering into the activities of their everyday lives.

Jesus' mother is there, and His friends are with Him. Jesus' mother comes up to Him and says, "*They have no more wine.*" Now, we don't know. Maybe she expected a miracle from Him. Or maybe, she just wanted Him to run to the Cana liquor store (*after all, He brought all His disciples with Him, so they all should chip in their fair share like at a church pot luck!*). Or maybe she was simply telling Him the way it is: the wine has run out, and when the wine runs out, the reception will be over ... the "happy moment" is about to be end, and it will soon be time for all of these now happy folks to go back home ... back to life, back to the money problems, back to the health problems, back to whatever season of it is at their homes. The wine is gone. At first Jesus seems to be nonchalant about it; He replies, "*Woman, why does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come;*" which paraphrased might mean, "*Oh, mom, this isn't my problem.*" But one can tell from the context He must have said this with a twinkle in His eye, with a wink and a nod to this woman who reared Him, because apparently His mother knew He was up to something. The words are no sooner out of Jesus' mouth than Mary turns to the servants and says, probably with a knowing smile of her own, "*Do whatever He tells you.*" By the way, that line ought to be underlined twice in your Bibles: "*Do whatever He tells you.*" Now. In the time, in the moment, in the season you have. To adapt another popular song from my misspent youth: "*When we find ourselves in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to us, speaking words of wisdom, DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU.*"

What do you do when your "wine" is running out? Now that's a metaphorical question, of course. Every person in this room lives with a quiet fear that the season will come for you when things will just run out, when the well will go dry, and you will have nothing left to give. Well, when your wine, whatever it may be, threatens to run out, look to Jesus, and *DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU*. When the joy of life threatens to run short, look to Jesus, and *DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU*. When your resolve for living with integrity and honor and sobriety threatens to fail you, look to Jesus, and *DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU*. When you are running out of patience, when you are running out of money, when you are running out of time, when you are running out of resolve, when you are running out of health ... whatever it is, *LOOK TO JESUS AND DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU*. Don't think about it, don't overanalyze it, don't wait for a "better" time to do what He tells you ... the time to do what He tells you is **RIGHT NOW**. Just do it. Choose to do what you know is right, what you know is honorable, what you know is good. *DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU*. If for no other reason than, more often than not, **THAT'S** when the miracles happen.

Jesus is moved by the ordinary situation of this young, anonymous couple whose happy moment is almost over. And according to John, Jesus chooses to launch His world redeeming, time-shaking, life changing ministry right there in Nowhere Special with His first miracle ... a miracle that seems almost frivolous, if not downright reckless. According to the text, He gives approximately one hundred and eighty gallons of wine to people who have already been drinking! That's a lot of wine! The banquet master said to the groom that most hosts bring out the cheap wine in the gallon jugs with screwtop bottle caps after everyone has been drinking for awhile, but you've saved the best for last! What extravagance. Notice, no one is healed. No injustice is made right. We are not sure that there are even any life lessons to be learned. So the reader might think, "*O Jesus, don't waste Your miracle-working power on this. Do something big!*"

But more often than not, this is the way Jesus works. His redemptive, life-saving, life transforming, miracle working power of grace comes in the present moment in the ordinary events and communal gatherings and conversations and celebrations of life with ordinary people in the everyday living of life ... and we discover He is right there in the thick of it just waiting to bless if His servants will just do whatever He tells them! In fact, the last line of the text tells us it was precisely *because* of Jesus' almost reckless extravagance here in Cana that the disciples came to put their faith in Him. **THIS** was a God they could give their allegiance to! They put their faith in this God-become-man Who deemed to enter the present moments of their lives to make their lives *better*.

And they saw what can happen when servants do what Jesus tells them. So they chose to **BECOME** His servants, doing what He told them ... in the time they had, in the season of life they were in.