

Time? Now! Place? Here!

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Mark 10:17-31

### **Mark 10:17-31**

<sup>7</sup> As he (Jesus) was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>18</sup> Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” <sup>20</sup> He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” <sup>21</sup> Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money<sup>[a]</sup> to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” <sup>22</sup> When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

<sup>23</sup> Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” <sup>24</sup> And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is<sup>[b]</sup> to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” <sup>26</sup> They were greatly astounded and said to one another,<sup>[c]</sup> “Then who can be saved?” <sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

<sup>28</sup> Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” <sup>29</sup> Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news,<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. <sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

The Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

There are two questions that need to be answered in order to move along the path toward God. One could spend a lifetime just considering these two questions and answers:

The first question is: What time is it? The second question is: Where are you?

The only correct answer to the first is, “Now!”

The only correct answer to the second is, “Here!”

So, if we remember anything at all today, let’s remember that the time is now, and the place is here.

Let's first talk about time. Both of our scripture readings today address time.

The first is Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is a great book. The author is someone keenly aware of the world and seeks to address everyday concerns of contemporary life. More specifically, Ecclesiastes is a book that honestly reflects on the ways of God in the world in order to provide helpful and eternal instructions on how to live.

The text Chad read a moment ago from chapter 3 is one of the most notable of Ecclesiastes and it talks about time. The author of Ecclesiastes makes it clear that there is a time for everything and there is a season for everything under the sun. The overall message of this passage highlights the rhythmic order of things that happen in the world and that the order and purpose of that time and those seasons are all known and ordained by God.

According to the author of Ecclesiastes, there is great confidence that the reason God made everything suitable for its time is for humanity to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, so all could eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. This is awesome news, right? You bet. It is usually in the happy and joyful moments when we feel as though we are capitalizing on the time we have.

Make no mistake, God wants us to be happy and to enjoy all we have, especially when it comes to how we spend our time, but we shouldn't simply stop there. It is the following verse that is the clarifier. **God gave humanity the gift of time, so all would stand in awe before him.** In other words, we aren't to simply take it and do whatever we want. We are to receive it, use it in such a way that honors God, and by doing so we will surely be happy and enjoy ourselves. We are to take it and decisively dedicate all of it to God.

The second is a powerful teaching moment in Mark. This passage is one filled with extreme demands, extreme judgements, and extreme responses.

It begins with a man, who by all accounts (curiosity, wealth, education, status, stuff, responsibility, family, children) could be us, asking Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. It is a time sensitive question, focused on the now seeking a sure and certain promise in the future. Even though there is much to discuss in this passage (like the commandments or a camel fitting through the eye of a needle), it is this question and Jesus' immediate answer to sell everything he owned, give it to the poor, and follow him, that we will focus today.

Let's think about it. Wondering what it takes to guarantee a ticket to heaven may very well be the most central question for us all. At the very least, we wonder what the

future holds? Taking a step into the future can be a difficult task: getting ready for the first day at school, going out on a first date, leaving the corporate job to set up your own business, undergoing experimental treatment for a life-threatening illness, selling or investing all we have and following Jesus.

The key to the future comes in Jesus' answer. What Jesus' response suggests is that we are saved only when we stop worrying about our salvation and turn our attention to God and neighbor now. I couldn't help but think of a tagline for a commercial I heard this week that says, "when you focus on today, tomorrow takes care of itself." It is a good thought right. We may or may not trust it, but I do think it is true. The only time we have a say in, is now.

What Jesus does is turn the focus away from the man's concern with his own salvation and points him toward gracious behavior to others. This not only touches on the need for the man to act immediately, it gets to the substance of the action required; sell everything, give everything, and follow.

Jesus' response echoes that of the highly anticipated answer to the question of the greatest commandment which calls us to "love the Lord your God with ALL your heart, soul, mind, and ability." Since the beginning, God has sought total commitment from us.

In regards to the substance, we might ask why and what: Why must this man give up his riches in order to follow Jesus and what will he get in return? Jesus tells the man and his disciples that everyone who has sacrificed for his sake will receive, now in this age, a hundred times more than he or she has given up, and will inherit eternal life, in the age to come.

Let's think about that for a moment. What would we give if we could guarantee a 100x return on our investments? We would all buy in immediately, right? Then why aren't we all running to the bank or to the phone to call our broker? We know one thing for sure and that is that God delivers on God's promises. Which leaves us with our willingness to give as the only question.

For this man, and for us, to sell everything and give it to the poor is an extreme response to an extreme demand. It is a decisive step into the future.

The time is now; to commit, to sacrifice, to sell out, to give, to follow.

Now, let's talk about the place. While I was in seminary, I hung a quote on my door and I read it every day, sometimes even multiple times a day:

"I want to be where I am, when I am there."

This quote has come to mean a couple of things for me. On one hand, it is a challenge to be content and be in the moment. When you have a lot of things going on at one time- work, family, kids, school- it is easy to become distracted and not be two places at once. This quote has challenged me to be fully present. On the other hand, it has taken me one step further and challenged me to buy in and dig deep. It is one thing to be some place with one foot in and the other foot out and another to be some place with both feet planted firmly. To use a sports analogy, the only way to make a successful play is to be in an athletic stance, which requires a solid foundation with both feet planted and ready. This quote has challenged me to be ready, fully commit, sacrifice, sell out, and give all I have wherever I am.

So, where are we? Physically, the answer for us all here today is First Presbyterian. The question I would ask is how present are we? Do we have one foot here and another someplace else or do we have both feet firmly planted ready for success?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the time is now, and the place is here.

Today is Consecration- Dedication- Stewardship Sunday. Today is a day in which we can celebrate the wealth we have all been given and celebrate our joining together in providing a solid foundation for God's church to be and do God's will. Today is a day in which we honor the gifts God has given to each of us, not only in faithfully coming forward to receive the gifts of bread and cup which unite us together, but by committing to give back to God a portion of what we make financially.

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. If we make \$50,000 a year, we would give a minimum of \$5000 back to God. When we do this, we are left with 90% to do with what we need to or like to. 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.

In relationship to this, we might ask why and what: Why must we give up our riches in order to support First Presbyterian and what will we get in return?

Our mission here at First Presbyterian is celebrating God's grace and inspiring the next generation for Christ and now is an exciting time to be a part of God's church here. Has there been change and transition? Yes, and some of it for some of us has been difficult, but most important thing is that the Spirit of God is surely in this place and we have so much going for us. To see this most notably, all we have to do is look around to those who are sitting to our right and to our left; those who are sitting in front of or behind us; those who are teaching our children in worship workshop or gateways or the nursery; those who will serve communion; those who sing in the choir; those who serve as elders and those who serve on committees; those who serve on the staff; those agencies and organizations and groups we partner with in serving our larger community. We can look to our fantastic facility and the joy we experience in coming to such a beautiful space. We can look back to history, tradition, and legacy. We can look ahead, in faith, to the potential of all God is calling First Presbyterian to be.

A little more than a year ago, I was initially taken back by a comment from a member of the community who shared with me that they viewed First Presbyterian as a "Sleeping Giant." On one hand, being a giant is a blessing. It means there is greatness to be experienced, respected, and celebrated. On the other hand, there is no church of God's that should be sleeping. 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.

You might ask how we would do that? My first suggestion is to pay attention to the needs of the church, which financially are an extreme demand to bridge the gap between what we pledge and the ministries we feel called to serve; a 16% increase from 2018. Since the beginning of time, the hope and future of the church has rested on God's shoulders, and God has faithfully worked through people like you and me to provide for the needs of the church. 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 demands.

To close this morning, I'd like to share a few small examples that shine some light on our giant status, and maybe, just maybe, they will awaken all the limbs that may still be a little sleepy.

A few months ago, I was approached by a couple about giving a gift to the church. The comment was made that all the pieces are in place and if there ever was a time to invest and buy in, it is now. After several conversations identifying and filtering through the needs of the church (a gift to the endowment, a bus, a miniature gym, a program), a gift to inspire spiritual growth became the focus. With a gift of \$50,000 over the next three years, the Clark Spiritual Growth Fund has now been set up to ensure inspiration for families, youth, and all God's children to stay on fire for God for what we hope will be a minimum of 25 years. The time is now, and the place is here.

First Presbyterian has also recently been the beneficiary of the Schreiber Gift, which was given a few years ago as a memorial fund to ensure the future of our radio ministry that expands the experience of worship and the hearing of God's word read, sung, and proclaimed. The total of this gift was near a half million, and in the radio world, this may very well be enough to get us all to eternity. The time is now, and the place is here.

Over the last two years, First Presbyterian has been able to make significant capital improvements to our landscaping and playgrounds. The Conrad Brown Fund was given in memory of loved ones with a passion for gardening, and it has helped replace and update landscaping around the outside of the sanctuary. The Peggy Teague Fund was given in memory of a woman, and other women, who loved children and youth and lived to teach and inspire. Multiple contributions and gifts to the Teague Fund have led to a beautiful and resourceful Children's Library, state of the art Toddler Playground, and most recently a new exploratory play area on the back playground. The joy and happiness of each child who plays in these areas is priceless. The time is now, and the place is here.

There are other examples and I encourage you to learn what those are. Every gift given to the church is a gift to God for God's purposes. More gifts are needed. I have faith that through the power of the Spirit, who is surely in this place, we, together, have exactly what we need to be God's church at this time.

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 now, and the place is here. First Presbyterian Church is a gift in trust to us to care for and provide for. Let's do our part today to ensure a promising future filled with celebration and inspiration. Every one of us matters. Every gift we give makes a difference.

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