

## For What has the Time Come?

Friends (long-time and new), let us wonder together on this seventh Sunday of the Easter season and on this Ascension Sunday: for what has the time come? I invite us to be open to this question as it relates both to our individual lives and the life of our congregation. Let us pray.

God of resurrection and renewal, your Spirit calls us to be radically present in each moment, in each breath we live. Be with us this morning as we each discern toward what next step your Love is calling us. In every waking moment, grant us serenity to accept the things that are not within our power to change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

For what has the time come? Our question for today derives from our reading from the book called The Acts of the Apostles. Many scholars agree that the book of Acts (filled with stories about the activity of the earliest Jesus followers) was written in the same voice (and so shares an author with) the gospel of Luke. Anytime we meditate on Jesus' teachings, we do well to remember their subversive power. He was executed by the Roman state as a political nuisance because he spoke out against the socioeconomic status quo, longing to subvert (disrupt, even overthrow) the unjust order of things. He likely could have stirred up sufficient energy among the Jewish working poor to attempt a rebellion against oppressive occupying Roman governance if his life had not been cut short.

In the prologue to Acts (that is, the five verses that precede today's reading), the author shares how the eleven apostles and others experienced Jesus appearing and interacting with them on various occasions in the forty days between Jesus' post-death resurrection and today's story of his ascent into heaven.

Jesus' roles in their lives as rabbi (that is, spiritual teacher) and also companion leader were so powerful as to defy barriers typically caused by death.

This morning's reading begins with this narrative moment among Jesus and the apostles at the Mount of Olives, on the outskirts of the holy city of Jerusalem. We heard:

*"When meeting together they asked, 'Has the time come, Rabbi? Are you going to restore sovereignty to Israel?'"* It makes so much sense that Jesus' disciples hoped he might have been the Messiah. For millennia, their ancestors in faith had expressed longings for a powerful one (anointed by God), who would usher in an age of peace and prosperity, restoring the well-being of the people of Israel.

Jesus basically responds to them by saying, no, but YOU could do that. He articulates it more eloquently, saying, *"It's not for you to know times or dates that Abba God has decided. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth."*

So the disciples had asked if the time had come for Jesus to lead a societal revolution. No, the one who cried from the cross, "It is finished!" had given all he could. His work as a living, breathing human being was done. But loving, healing, empowering action inspired by Jesus' legacy was just beginning. **I wonder, for each of us individually and as a congregation, for what loving, healing, empowering action has the time come?**

Let's turn for a moment to our reading from Psalm 68. Knowing that God is boundless Love, which seeks embodiment through each of us, I will substitute the word Love in for God as I read to you a brief portion of the Psalm.

In the beauty surrounding us, I invite you to close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so, listening for a word God is speaking to you today. As we listen, let us wonder: For what has the time come? For what Jesus-inspired love-embodying action has the time come? With you eyes closed if you wish.

*“Arise, O Love, and scatter your enemies!...  
A Parent to the orphan and protector of the defenseless is our Love,  
who dwells in holiness!  
Love creates families for those who are alone,  
and leads captives to freedom;  
but the rebellious dwell in a parched land.*

*You gave rain in abundance, O Love,  
you restored the land – our inheritance – when it languished;  
your tribe found a dwelling in it,  
in your goodness, O Love, you provided for the needy.”*

Friends, how will each of us in our own time and spaces answer the Psalmist’s cries?

- How will you scatter Love’s enemies?
- How will you nurture and protect the defenseless?
- How will you create families for those who are alone?
- How will you lead captives to freedom?
- How will you restore the languishing land?
- How will you provide for those in need?

I experienced a very full week in recent days. It culminated yesterday as our May Festival unfolded, welcoming in hundreds of neighbors from our wider community. From Monday evening through Thursday afternoon, I participated in the Festival of Homiletics in Minneapolis. Homiletics is the art and practice of preaching. This annual festival typically gathers two to

three thousand preachers from a wide variety of Christian denominations somewhere in the US each May. I had attended the festival once previously (in 2014, a few weeks before my son Sam was born).

This year, we heard lectures and sermons from five renowned speakers each day. Some of those talks were in the context of worship services filled with stirring music. Our theme was “Preaching Hope to a Weary World.” And it caused me paused to realize how much I feel our community preaches or speaks and embodies hope to a weary world. I look forward to returning to my notes in hopes that what I experienced and learned will have positive impact on my own preaching and our life as a community.

Another part of the fullness of my week involved the Thursday evening celebration (a graduation of sorts) and Friday morning final learning session of my year-long program with the Leadership Center for Social Justice through United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. At the celebration, we seventeen pastors shared our social justice ministry projects in the style of a school science fair.

I have worked with our Pastoral Relations Committee to create my project, entitled “Drawn to the Center: Embodying Inclusion through 1-to-1 Conversations.” Based in principles of community organizing, our Pastoral Relations Committee members will reach out to a handful of our congregation members in coming weeks to check in with them around the various significant discernment processes we’ve been navigating as a congregation such as denominational affiliation, park improvement possibilities, our current quarterly mission (focused on land recognition and stewardship), and our potential merger with St. Peter’s United Church of Christ.

As I prepared to attend that celebration of our Leadership Center for Social Justice cohort and as I considered the question posed by the story of Jesus' ascension (For what has the time come?), what came to mind were the four guiding principles or movements of the program with which I lived the past nine months with my classmates: sensing, discerning, committing, building. I'd like to share them with you now, hopeful that they might guide you as you continue to wonder (for you): for what has the time come? I will share them as articulated by program director Ry Siggelkow and the six teaching fellows who served as our instructors.

*SENSING – “We begin with curiosity. The unjust and deadly systems and structures in which we live alienate us from each other and from the earth. In a spirit of curiosity, we explore the world around us and our fundamental interconnectedness... We activate and make use of our senses (listening, seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, smelling), including our emotional and spiritual senses.”* **As we each consider for what the time has come, I invite us to embody curiosity that breaks through alienation.**

*DISCERNING – “We move from sensing to discerning, from observing the world around us to making critical judgments. We undertake the ongoing ministerial task of “discerning the spirits” (what is life-giving and what is death-dealing?). The unjust and deadly systems and structures in which we live are often invisible to us, regarded as simply part of the “order of nature.” Because we tend to adjust to our surroundings and the world as-it-is, it takes ongoing critical discernment (“consciousness”) to demystify the world.”* **As we each consider for what the time has come, I invite us to discern what is life-giving and what is death-dealing in our lives.**

*COMMITTING – “We move from discerning to committing, from making critical judgments to taking risks in faith, hope, and love.*

*We move from developing a “critical consciousness” to developing a set of concrete commitments with our congregations, as we seek to radically imagine new ways of living, loving, and ministering within our community and neighborhoods.”* **As we each consider for what the time has come, I invite us to commit – to take imaginative risks in faith, hope and love.**

*BUILDING – “We move from committing to building, from making commitments with our congregations to developing a framework, plan, or project for building or renewing sustainable, contextually-rooted, and concrete ministries for social justice. We will explore the power of intentional relationships, organizing campaigns for social justice, and co-creating sustainable ministries.”* **As we each consider for what the time has come, I invite us to build – to labor and co-create together.**

As we each and together move forward, may we sense, discern, commit and build – for the time has come and Love is counting on us. Amen.

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Psalm 68:1-10,32-35; Acts 1:6-14