GOD'S TIME

Epiphany 3, 2021

"After John had been arrested, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming…God. 'The time has come; the time is fulfilled; the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe (there is) Good News." Something like Mk 1:14-15

Jesus, according to St Mark, had just been baptized by John, had seen the heavens ripped open before his eyes, and almost immediately John was arrested and headed for execution. This was the prelude to Jesus declaring that the time – Kairos, God's time – had come. The time, (God's time), was fulfilled – complete – and it was time for God and God's people to act.

But it sure didn't look like it. The people Jesus went to first were fishermen who were barely making a living. They couldn't afford "time off" for a spiritual retreat or a mission to the Gentiles or Jews or Romans or anyone else. They had to survive. Their whole world was in turmoil. It hadn't been very many years since Rome took over Palestine, and people had long memories. Roman soldiers were everywhere, keeping the "Pax Romana", insuring peace by any means necessary. Poverty was everywhere. Hunger and starvation were normal. No possible conversation about civil rights, gender equality, religious freedoms, or free speech. John the Baptist knew all about that. So did the terrorist, Jesus Barrabas, by the way. And so did Jesus of Nazareth. It was time, God's time, to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God. But despite the dangers, despite the difficulties, Jesus found a handful of people who were moved by his vision – moved to the point of real action, even though some of them barely understood what the message was.

St Mark only uses this word, “fulfilled”, only one other time in the Gospel story. As Jesus prays in the Garden of Gesthemene and the disciples fall asleep all around him, he realizes that is again “God’s time”. “Let the Scriptures be fulfilled,” he says, as Judas and a troop of soldiers begin to climb the hill, and as Peter reaches for his sword..

Our time in America – chronos, not Kairos - is not quite like that – though we are struggling right now. Everywhere we turn we are reminded just how far we still have to go if we are to be a “beacon for the nations.” Racism, classism, and many other “isms” haunt us as we attempt to form a great society and as we try to be faithful to what is clearly a time – Kairos - for God to act. We are captives to our divisions: liberal and conservative; urban and rural; black, white, and brown; Ivy League and Big Ten. A pandemic rages and we choose up sides: masked or unmasked; home-schooling or in school instruction; quarantined vs free range. Economists confuse us with differing prognosis as to how to help. And more than anything we want somebody to blame.

It is time for God and God’s people to act. And out of Galilee, still coming for us, is Jesus of Nazareth. He has lost his close friend and cousin. His parents had been on the run from the Romans and the Jews. His family thinks he has lost his mind, and the authorities are beginning to watch him closely. It may no longer be safe to associate with Jesus anymore. But, you know, thousands did. Millions have. They didn’t look much like people with power to change the world. For God’s sake, in the beginning many of them were Roman soldiers. Lots of them were destitute, sick, dying. And many were women in a time when they had few legal rights, no authority, no power. Except that they all found power and purpose

and authority in Jesus. They found Good News in his vision of a world that broke down barriers and divisions. They found hope in a world where they had felt trapped by social conventions and political entrapments. And many felt called to share their vision and their hope with the rest of the world.

Jonah, caught in God's time in an earlier day, tried to run, to escape the call to serve. He had no interest in rescuing people that he hated, people with whom he disagreed, people who had not treated his people well. He would rather die than to warn the people of Nineveh of their impending doom. He would do anything to get out of his responsibility to assist a group of people different than himself, people who worshipped in a different way, who had odd customs, people who spoke an odd language. It took all of God's imagination and a very large fish to help Jonah see the error to his ways. But God and God's time were not to be denied….

So we come to today, and it is still and again God's time. There is a man or woman or a crowd coming out of Galilee – or perhaps St Louis or Des Moines or Pine Bluff, Ark or Deer Isle or some other strange place – someone who will call us to ministry, to bring together people who do not necessarily want to come together. And we will be invited to follow and participate and show others how this can be done. Already, God is on the move. Already, many of you have been called, have taken on the work. Many of you zooming in today are already hard at work welcoming, feeding, caring for people you hardly know – people who need your invitation, your vision, your faith that this world is more than ever in the hands of a loving and faithful God.

The Good News that Jesus brought with him when he came to Galilee after John's arrest is that nothing will prevent the fulfillment of God's kingdom coming to earth. Even as Jesus later stood in the Garden with his faithful disciples, exhausted by struggle, asleep at his feet – even then the time would be fulfilled, because God never sleeps, God never abandons us. God simply finds a way where there seems to be no way. God finds sleepy people like you and me to fulfill the dream. So when we are weary of the call, when we'd rather just stay away or jump ship like Jonah, remember that God is always faithful. God is always on the way. It is always God's time. Amen.