

The Rev. Dr. Hilary B. Smith

Holy Comforter

Richmond, VA

January 24, 2016; the 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany

Readings: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 14:14-21.

The Time Is Now

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, right after his baptism and his temptation in the wilderness.

Jesus goes to his home town and shocks his family and friends with his focused, determined sense of call.

Jesus has been anointed by the Holy Spirit in his baptism; he has been tested and strengthened through his wilderness time, and now he is proclaiming his purpose, who he is for us and for the world.

He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus is saying that he is the one...he is the one sent by God to bring

healing, to bring forgiveness, to bring sight, to bring justice, to bring mercy to us and to all people.

Jesus is proclaiming in this action, in his words, that the waiting is over; the time is now.

The time is now.

If you were to ask me why it is that I'm a Christian, what it is about Jesus that makes me want to follow this path, who I say Jesus is...I would talk with you about this reading from Luke, this story of Jesus in the synagogue reading from the prophet Isaiah.

There is something about this story that touches my heart and gives me hope and gives me energy to help others.

In this reading, I connect with Jesus as the One who has the power to bring healing to me personally and healing to our world, NOW--- that the wait is over and we are invited to be part of the jubilee year...the year when all debts would be forgiven and all the slaves would be free and all who had been oppressed would have a fresh start.

We are a faith community that listens to these words, living words, enlivened by the Spirit for us today, we are a community that listens to these words and follows the one who desires our healing, who desires that we see, who desires that we are part of bringing justice to all people, now.

What is the healing for which you long, personally, societally, and environmentally?

When you hear Jesus say that he is the One and the time is Now, open

your heart to that possibility and imagine what God wants for you,
 God who created you and adores you;
 imagine what God wants for our world and how God may be inviting you to
 help...how God might be inviting Holy Comforter to help...yes, we
 are helping in many ways already.

On the Sunday of my installation as your rector and our celebration of the
 renewal of our ministry, we brought bags of food to the Altar and you
 invited me as your rector to join in our ministry with those in
 need with these words:

*Hilary, receive this food, and join with us in the ministry of feeding the hungry,
 those who hunger for bread and justice.*

And I replied

*Amen. May our ministry to and with our neighborhood, the city, and the world
 bring hope and peace through our commitment to making God's reign visible.*

In all of our efforts to make God's reign visible...to be co-creators with God
 who desires the healing and liberation of all people and all
 systems...in all that we do, may we always open ourselves to
 hear the words of Jesus that day at the start of his
 ministry and know that God has also
 anointed us, and called us, and will always be
 with us to lead and strengthen us in our
 efforts to live into God's reign.

And may those words of Jesus give us hope and determination...knowing
 that in Christ and through Christ, the reign, the healing and the justice
 of God has been known and seen, in us and among us,
 through the power of the Spirit.

That the time is NOW to live into God's reign.

Jesus said, the time is NOW, these words have been fulfilled in your
 hearing...no more need to wait for God to act and send a savior...the
 time is now.

Patience is a virtue; we have told that our whole lives, from the first

time that we wanted something now, and our parents told us to wait. Patience is a spiritual virtue, but waiting from the faith perspective does not mean doing nothing and waiting for God to make everything right. Waiting for us means taking an active role in our personal healing and the healing of the world, knowing that it won't all happen today, but that tomorrow can be better because of the choices we make today.

I wonder sometimes, what time is for God.

How does God experience time?

Alan Jones, retired dean of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, wrote a prayer book called *Hour by Hour*, in which he says this about time,

“The spiritual tradition tells us that time is a creature (part of creation).

Time is one of the things over which we have no control.

It cannot be stopped or manipulated and it flows in only one direction---at least as far as we know.

It can, however, be sanctified.

The minutes, hours, days, months and years are capable of being woven into a pattern of praise and penitence, giving shape to our joys and our sorrows, tragedies and triumphs.”¹

I like this idea of sanctifying time; we do that by praying throughout the day as Jones is encouraging, and we sanctify time through our prayerful actions to make God's reign visible.

As our Book of Common Prayer states: “Prayer is responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words.”²

This past week, we remembered and celebrated the work and ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

We remember and celebrate even as we mourn his death and we grieve that there is still racism in our city, our country, our world.

In Dr. King's last Sunday sermon, given at our National Cathedral, just days before he was assassinated, Dr. King spoke about time and how we as Christians need to understand our relationship to time:

“The hour has come for everybody, for all institutions of the public sector

¹ Alan Jones, *Hour By Hour*, Cincinnati: Forward Movement Publications, 2002, p. iii.

² Found in the Catechism in *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 856.

and the private sector to work to get rid of racism.
 And now if we are to do it we must honestly admit certain things and get rid of certain myths that have constantly been disseminated all over our nation.

One is the myth of time. It is the notion that only time can solve the problem of racial injustice.

And there are those who often sincerely say to the Negro and his allies in the white community, 'Why don't you slow up?

Stop pushing things so fast. Only time can solve the problem.

And if you will just be nice and patient and continue to pray, in a hundred or two hundred years the problem will work itself out.'

There is an answer to that myth. It is that time is neutral. It can be used either constructively or destructively.

And I am sorry to say this morning that I am absolutely convinced that the forces of ill will in our nation, the extreme rightists of our nation—the people on the wrong side—have used time much more effectively than the forces of goodwill.

And it may well be that we will have to repent in this generation.

Not merely for the vitriolic words and the violent actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people who sit around and say, "Wait on time."

Somewhere we must come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability.

It comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals who are willing to be co-workers with God.

And without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the primitive forces of social stagnation.

So we must help time and realize that the time is always ripe to do right."³

This sermon was given on March 31, 1968, and this message about time and justice is as needed now as it was then.

Certainly the allies of justice have used time in these last almost 48 years to fight racism and there have been victories.

We have come a long way in some ways, but some days it seems that we haven't... there is much more to do...and this is true of all that is not just in the world and of all that needs healing in our lives and in

3

http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_remaining_awake_through_a_great_revolution/

our communities.

Time alone won't do it for us.

Waiting for justice never works.

The time *is* always ripe to do right.

The time is now to be co-workers with God, to make God's reign

visible...to stand with Jesus in the synagogue as he speaks of who

he is and, by implication, who we are who join with him, that he

has been anointed *to bring good news to the poor,*

release to the captives, recovery of sight to the

blind, to let the oppressed go free, to

proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

As those who follow the Way of Jesus, we stand with him on that day; he

stands with us now on this day; God through Christ strengthens us

and gives us the hope to be people who are about healing and

justice, now. Amen.