

The Time has Grown Short

[Jonah 3:1-5, 10](#)

[1 Corinthians 7:29-31](#)

[Mark 1:14-20](#)

I confess that I procrastinate. This will not be news to most of you. Before my brain really kicks in to get something done, I have to develop a sense of urgency. Today's readings all have a sense of urgency – “the appointed time has grown short”, “the time is fulfilled”. You would think that even someone as dedicated to challenging deadlines as I, would get that something is up. But that was over 2000 years ago... does the urgency of a prior millennium still have any urgency for us today?

Perhaps not, and yet doesn't every generation have its own moments of urgency? Look at Jonah – perhaps the ultimate procrastinator. He did everything he could not to go to Nineveh, but when he finally did, the people heard him and believed God and they turned from their evil ways and the calamity was averted.

Today my friends, we are like the people of Nineveh; a great calamity is upon us. It is a calamity in slow motion and so it's difficult for our primitive brains to develop a sense of urgency. If we were facing a sabre-tooth tiger we would know immediately that we needed to do something; our flight or fight response would kick in and one way or another we would deal with it. But the climate crisis is here and it's real and yet it's not in our face, it's not breathing fetid breath and roaring at us; it is going on slowly and imperceptibly in the background of our lives.

But it is urgent that we notice. It is urgent that we change our ways and work together for the redemption of our planet and all the life upon it. It is past time for us, like the people of Nineveh, to proclaim

a fast from fossil fuels and everyone, great and small, to put on sackcloth, and turn from our evil ways. It is past time.

For Paul, writing to the Corinthians, the time was so short that the work of God took precedence over everything. “For the present form of this world is passing away,” he wrote. We can be sure that the present form of this world is passing away – the world our grandchildren inherit will be very different. Is not this a time in our lives when time is so short, the urgency so great that we should put aside everything else for the great work, the Great Turning?

It seems that there is a pattern whereby every five hundred years or so there has been an upheaval in the socio-political and religious life of humanity. We are in one of those times right now. A time when things unravel. A time when what was thought to be sure is questioned and then almost imperceptibly at first, new answers, new ideas appear. Much has already unraveled. More may yet come apart. These are not comfortable times to live in.

But, people of God, they are our times. For us this is the appointed time. The time has for us been fulfilled and the reign of God has come near. So how shall we respond?

Jesus said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” To repent is to turn. This time has been called the Great Turning – but it will only be known by our descendants as the Great Turning if we turn. Otherwise it may be remembered as the Great Extinction when thousands of species became extinct, civilizations toppled, and millions of humans died of famine, flood and disease.

We are at an exciting moment in our nation's history. After four years of lies and bullying being normalized, we have elected a President with a history of working cooperatively who promises to tell us the truth. We have looked into one future and chosen another. But we cannot sit back thinking that all is well.

What would have happened if the leaders of Nineveh, then the most powerful city in the world, had said "We've got this handled," and the people had gone about their lives in the same old way, no sackcloth, no ashes, no repentance? Would God have changed his mind about the calamity that was about to fall on them? Probably not.

I don't want you to go away and say that I preached that the climate crisis is God punishing us or choosing to bring a calamity upon us. The ancient writers might see it that way, but I think it is that our behavior has consequences and our rape of the Earth for resources so that we can live the most comfortable, resource-rich life this planet has ever seen, has led to changes in the climate which are speeding up and as they speed up so life as we know it is threatened. This is a time for repentance, for turning. This is a time of urgency, not a time to wait.

And it is not just about climate change. The climate crisis symbolizes the way our human attitude of taking as much as we can for ourselves has created imbalance and inequality. Our failure to love our environment is mirrored in our failure to love our neighbor. It is no co-incidence that many black people live in areas where the air is scarcely breathable. It is no co-incidence that the rich are still getting richer and the poor are dealing not just with poverty but with

rising sea levels taking away their homes, increased flooding ruining their crops or drought and locust destroying their livelihood.

In this country, the pandemic has hit indigenous and black communities much harder than white. In this county, Latinx people are almost three times more likely to have been infected with coronavirus than the rest of us.

Economically, the stock market is still doing well, blessing those who have investments or pensions that rely on investments but more than 20 million jobs have been lost and one in four Americans is having trouble paying their bills. It has been described as a K shaped recovery with some going up the arm of the K, and many falling down the leg. The system is rigged.

The system is rigged against the Earth and the system is rigged against the majority of humanity so that the minority can continue to be comfortable and live insulated from the deep inequities and the deep grief of our world.

Jesus said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” My friends, what are we waiting for? The moment is urgent. The reign of God has come near – will we repent? Will we return and believe in the good news that God is a God of love and of liberation? Will we get on board with the work that God is already doing, that God is already engaged in to bring something new out of this time of unravelling?

Will we be part of the Great Turning or of the Great Extinction?

Jesus is calling, “Follow me.”