

“You Know What Time It Is”

Some of you will remember this: *“Hey, kids! What time is it?” (“It’s Howdy Doody time!”)*

“Time, time, time . . .” (. . . it’s on my side — yes it is.)

“Does anybody really know what time it is?” (“Does anybody really care.”)

“It’s about time,” we say after a long wait.

*“Time it was, and what a time it was, it was
A time of innocence, a time of confidences
Long ago, it must be, I have a photograph
Preserve your memories, they’re all that’s left you.”*

*“If I could save time in a bottle the first thing that I’d like to do
Is to save every day till eternity passes away
Just to spend them with you.*

*If I could make days last forever, if words could make wishes come true
I’d save every day like a treasure and then, again, I would spend them
with you.”*

*But there never seems to be enough time
To do the things you want to do once you find them
I’ve looked around enough to know that you’re the one I want
to go through time with.”*

The subject, obviously, is time.

The Greeks had these two words for time: *chronos* (χρονος) and *kairos* (καιρος). *Chronos* is the time measured by a clock or a calendar; it is linear time. When the question is, *“What time is it?”* the *chronos* answer is *“8:44 AM. on Tuesday, November 29.”* *Kairos* is time pregnant with meaning. If this phrase were have to come from a Greek text — *“It was the best of times; is was the worst of times.”* (it didn’t; that’s from Dickens) — the word in Greek would have been *kairos*. *Kairos* is “the

right time,” time that suggests importance, significance, impact. When the question is, “*What time is it?*” the kairos answer is “*We may have to wait to see.*”

St. Paul and Jesus seem to give us contradictory messages about time in today’s lessons. Paul says, “*You know what time it is . . .*” while Jesus says, “*About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*” So which is it? Do we know or don’t we? Can we know, and can we not? Whether you pick it up or not, both Jesus and Paul are delivering the same message.

Jesus insists that the end time cannot be known by any other than the Father. That presents us with some Trinitarian issues, but suffice it to say at this point that WE do not know. Anyone who suggests that they do know, Jesus labeled a charlatan, a deceiver. There are people around, and have been for millennia, who would like to tell you that they have figured out all the secrets of the Book of Revelation, or of Daniel and Ezekiel, and can give you the inside scoop on what these books are trying to tell us about the future. I can tell you that in one sentence: “*The end is coming, and for some it will be a very bad thing, and for others it will be a triumphant moment.*” Oh, I guess I will need two sentences: “*Nobody knows when that will be!*”

Jesus addresses this issue more than once, and each time wants to make sure we understand. It is not just that there is a gap in our information, there is a purposeful denial of access to that information. Just before His Ascension, the disciples asked Jesus, “*Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?*” — which seems to be a perfectly legitimate question in view of all they had seen of the Risen Christ for forty days. He replied, “*It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.*” Please note: Jesus did not say that the disciples had missed something that they should have picked up on. He told them that they were not supposed to know, it was not their place to know . . . one gets the suggestion that Jesus is a slight bit piqued at the idea that they want to know.

How then can St. Paul say, ***“You know what time it is . . .”***? Jesus says we can’t know, we’re not supposed to know, it may even be wrong for us to know. So Paul, how can we know? Maybe I should let Paul finish his thought: ***“You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.”*** Paul is more than suggesting that we snap to, pay attention, and get ready, because ***“salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers . . .”*** Paul is not telling the Romans, or us, or anyone else, that he, Paul, has an inside source that has clued him in to what only the Father knows — He is telling them that, whenever that time, that day, is to come, now is the time to get ready. Why? Precisely because we do not know when the time will come.

Jesus left us all kinds of clues to look for. In today’s Gospel He tells us, ***“Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.”*** Earlier in Matthew’s Gospel He warned: ***“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.”***

St. Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, cites the prophet Joel: ***“I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.”***

I could set forth several dozen examples of these kinds of messages from our Lord, from the followers of Christ, even from the Old Testament prophets . . . and every one of them would come with this attached to it: ***“So get ready, because you don’t know.”***

Which is Paul’s message to the Romans: ***“ . . . it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.”*** Contemporary Christians are inclined (or might that be *reclined*?) to be asleep at the switch. You do know to what that refers, don’t you? When a train is rolling down the track at fifty, sixty miles per hour, the switch that will alter its course needs to be pulled at the right time, or the train may derail or run into an ongoing train. If the

switch operator falls asleep and doesn't make the switching track move in the right direction at the right time, disaster may result.

It a very apt illustration for what we, as Christ's followers, are to be about. We have work to do in this time between when Jesus left and when He shall return — and we don't know how much time there is.

Some of that work is intensely personal. Paul tells us, to ***“lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy.”*** We zero in on a few of those words and claim that we got it nailed: No drunkenness here! (Thanksgiving, birthdays, office parties don't count, do they?). Debauchery or licentiousness are of no concern (because the internet certainly does not offer such enticements). Quarreling and jealousy? Here? (Did you see the outfit she was wearing last Sunday?)

Did we ***“lay aside the works of darkness”***? Have we ***“put on the armor of light”***? There is much work that you and I can be doing to enhance our relationship with Christ, with the Holy Spirit, with the Father, with one another: Are you completely satisfied with your prayer life? Should you be? What else do you do to connect with God? Fasting? Meditation? Retreats? For ages Christians have found such practices edifying and enriching to their pilgrimage of faith.

Some of the work we are to be about takes us outside of ourselves. A cartoon in Leadership magazine years ago showed a Pastor at the pulpit with a congregation of three seated before him and he was saying, *“The Great Commission bids us to go and make disciples. Our bank thinks that would be a great idea, as well.”* But who is supposed to find and get those new members? Any guesses?

This congregation does quite a bit of what we call outreach (some would call it social ministry ... *“A rose by any other name ...”*). Food keeps coming to the community pantry. There always seems to be material that goes the Redeemer Crisis Center. Akron Pregnancy Services gets support

in multiple ways. Funds for Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry continue. We should take pride in the fact that we are heeding the call from our Lord to care for ***“the least of these, my brothers and sisters.”*** We should also learn how to let the world know what we are doing in these areas so that others may be drawn to join us, not only in working, but in worshiping.

We have not done so well at another form of outreach, an invitational outreach. I can state with assurance that everyone in this room knows someone who has no relationship with Christ or no church they call their own. You may not know that you know this about someone you know, but I bet it’s true. Someone you know, more than likely someone about who you care, is adrift, apart from Christ.

“So how do I go about finding out if this is the case, and what do I do with that information?” you ask. I know, it is a very personal question. But this is someone you know, but if you don’t know this about that person, you don’t know her or him well enough. Then you invite. Come with me . . . if not to church, then to a dinner, or some other activity. Oh wait, we haven’t had such activities much in the past year or two. So add another step: Help plan some event to which you and others can invite friends and family to join with you, and then volunteer to help make it happen.

Why do this? Because the bank thinks it’s a good idea? No, because the time is, for all we know, quickly coming when there will be no opportunity left. Because our Lord cares about these people who are apart from His sheepfold. Because we care about these people (or at least we say we do).

“You know what time it is,” Paul tells us, ***“how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.”*** The word for sleep there is ὕπνος (hypnos) and could be easily translated as “trance.” Here’s a paraphrase, ***“Snap out of it! You’re almost out of time! Get crackin’! Time’s a-wastin’!”*** You and I cannot sleepwalk through our world, not where our faith and life in Christ is concerned.

No, we do not ***“know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.”*** But we had better realize, and realize now, that we do know that this is the day we need to get busy with the task of sharing the Gospel whenever, wherever, with whomever God sends us and puts us together with another wanderer. And if you are sitting there saying under your breath, *“I can’t do that. I just can’t.”* I feel your pain. So, while I’m looking in the mirror, I must say also to you, *“Get over yourself.”*

This is precisely what Paul was addressing when he wrote, ***“ . . . put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”*** If your flesh desires to hide rather than reach out, put on Christ. If your flesh is afraid it won’t know what to do or say, put on Christ. If your flesh is telling you to let someone else take this job, put on Christ. ***“For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near . . . Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”***

Come on. You know what time it is.

Amen.