

Luke 19:29-38
A Time to Grow: Palm Sunday
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Time after time. Time flies. A stitch in time saves nine. Time for a change.
Time is money. Too much time on my hands. Never enough time. In the nick of time.
Time will tell. Time stood still. What time is it? The time is right.
We talk about time a lot. It must be important.

Every night before my grandma went to bed, she wound the clock on the mantel. It was the last thing she did before going to the bedroom. That clock, and its hourly chimes, was a constant in my grandparents' home for as long as I can remember. You could count on it...like clockwork. My grandpa didn't pay any attention to that clock until my grandma died, and then every night, before he went to bed, he would the clock. As I've reflected on this lately, I imagine that as he the clock, he felt connected to grandma.

There are many ways we human beings keep time. We have our clocks and our watches. We have our calendars and our planners. Even the Church has its own way of keeping time. It's called the liturgical year. It begins with Advent. So far this liturgical year, we have lived out Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, and now, Lent. Each season invites us to something new. Lent is a time of self-reflection, a time to look in the mirror and ask questions like, "How do I feel about me? How do I feel about my relationship with the Holy? And how about my relationships with family, friends, and neighbors? In what ways do I need to grow and change to become who I was created to be?"

That's a lot of introspection for me...maybe for you, too. Sometimes, Lent seems to drag on forever. I don't know if this is so because of the nature of the season or because Lent begins during the cold and dark part of the year. It's probably both. For me, time seems to go slower when I am cold and don't get enough sun.

The liturgical calendar, sunrises and sunsets, changes in weather patterns, they all remind us that there is a rhythm to life. The book of Ecclesiastes affirms that as well: "For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). There is a time to do something and a time not to. As a teenager, I learned that there were times when a well-placed swear word was appreciated by my parents, and there were times, like when relatives were visiting when it was not. Timing is everything. Good comedians understand this. Even those of us who aren't comedians know that there is a time for jokes and a time when it's best to save our humor for later.

On the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem, Jesus knew what time it was. People were everywhere. The city was packed with Jewish people who had come for Passover.

This is Luke 19: 29-48.

²⁹ When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.' " ³² So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ They said, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵ Then they brought it to Jesus, and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ Now as he was approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸ saying,

"Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!"

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." ⁴⁰ He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

⁴¹ As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴² saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ Indeed, the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God."^[a]

⁴⁵ Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there, ⁴⁶ and he said, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers."

⁴⁷ Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him, ⁴⁸ but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.

On this annual pilgrimage to the capital for Passover, the Jewish people celebrated and remembered their deliverance from enslavement in Pharaoh's Egypt. This ritual of thousands, some estimate as many as 500,000, must have made the Romans anxious. As occupiers of Jerusalem, they were always on watch for potential uprisings that involved charismatic "dangerous" leaders. New Testament scholar Amy-Jill Levine writes, "Rome's agents, including the governor and Pontius Pilate, recognized that

when the crowds hailed a new hero, they were also challenging Roman authority.”¹ Certainly, an annual festival of liberation from a prior occupier’s power would make the current occupiers edgy. Into this tension marched Jesus and his followers. Jesus knew what time it was.

The text tells us that when he saw the city, he cried. It must have been painfully clear that the Romans knew nothing about the kin-dom of God he had spent the last three years talking about. Oppression and cruelty were everywhere. As Jesus entered the city, it was loud. His followers were singing; people were cheering. We talk about this scene and even act it out as if it were a parade. Admittedly, in some ways, it was parade-like. People lined the streets; there was probably a feeling of hope and I bet the children were joyful with all the excitement. But unlike a parade, as Jesus came by, I imagine the people lining the streets allowed Jesus to pass, and then they joined the procession. As he rode on his donkey, the crowd behind him got larger and louder. This was not a parade. It was a protest.

Jesus, surrounded by all those people, was making fun of the Romans. He was trolling them, making fun of their big-ego, big-flex, big-power trip ways. He rode in on a donkey as people waved branches, but the Romans, when they rode into the city, came on their war horses with their spears and their armor, making sure everyone understood who was in charge. Their oppressive ways were on full display.

The crowd was shouting and singing Hosanna. Their words connected to Psalm 118, which is a psalm that was sung by the Jewish people as they traveled to Jerusalem. “Save us, we beseech you, O God,” the Psalm says. The crowd around Jesus was living in the present and re-telling the story of their past. They were remembering. We can imagine this scene as a re-enactment of the Israelites’ liberation from Egypt. The crowds used the words of their ancestors as a ritual of faith and freedom. But their cries were a prayer and a hope for their day, too. Deliverance from Roman occupation, economic struggle, hunger, and more. “Save us, O God.” The past had become present, and their ancestor’s words, their own. It was as if time was repeating itself.

The Pharisees begged Jesus to quiet his followers. Jesus knew that was impossible and if he was honest, I bet he didn’t want them to be quiet. It was time. It was Passover. Could there be a better way to remember their ancestors’ liberation than to struggle for and demand freedom in the present?

In this Gospel, Jesus went to the Temple right away and disrupted Temple business. The text says he drove out the people selling things. It’s important to note that selling things was not the problem. It was necessary for there to be somewhere for people to buy the animals needed for sacrifice. This was a part of Temple life. Jesus was basically making a scene in order to get the attention of the faithful. You see, the

¹ Levine, Amy-Jill. *Entering the Passion of Jesus [Large Print]: A Beginner’s Guide to Holy Week*. United States, Abingdon Press, 2018.

Temple should have been the place for the revelation and outpouring of God's plan in the world. Instead, using language from Jeremiah 7:11, Jesus criticized the Temple as a "cave for bandits," that is, a safe haven for Jerusalem's leaders, who, having completed acts of violence against the poor, find sanctuary from justice rather than condemnation.

The Temple and the Temple authorities were supposed to be sanctuaries and allies for the ones who were vulnerable, but the whole Temple machine had aligned itself with the Romans. We should remember this as we listen to the rhetoric espoused by some who declare our nation a Christian nation. It is not and, those of us who identify as Christians are the ones who should be vehemently guarding the line between the Church and State. The Church should always, always be on the side of the ones who are vulnerable, holding the State accountable. Church leaders should always, always use their position to bring about justice and wholeness for all people, not to bring about their own comfort. Always...even when they are afraid.

There was a lot of fear in Jerusalem that day. The Romans were very much in charge and, as is often the case in situations where there is an imbalance of power, the ones with a lot to lose (Jewish leaders) aligned themselves with power, leaving the ones with nothing to lose, the ones who were the most vulnerable, even more vulnerable. To be clear, the Jewish leaders were not evil people. They were scared people. They were afraid that if they didn't get in line, it would be detrimental to not only them personally but to their faith. I am sure that because they were human, there was an element of comfort as well for some of them. The bottom line is that everyone was afraid and when everyone is afraid, the ones in power always benefit and the status quo remains.

Day after day, Jesus went to the Temple; day after day, he talked to the people there about the kingdom of God, and, in a surprise to no one, that kingdom was nothing like the kingdom of Caesar they were experiencing. The Temple authorities, the chief priests, scribes, and other leaders could not allow themselves and the Temple to be associated with anti-Rome anything. So, of course, they were looking for a way to kill Jesus. They didn't hate him. They didn't care about him personally at all. They cared about retaining their power. He scared them. And power did what power does. It deals death to anyone who presents a threat or a perceived threat. But we will save that part of the story for later in the week. It is not time.

Throughout this series, we've been using the metaphor of a garden to talk about growth. Gardeners know that after the soil is prepared, the seeds planted, water and light supplied, there comes a point when what is needed is time. We plant our tomatoes in the spring and don't get to make our salsa until summer. We can't hurry it along. Produce doesn't taste as good if it's picked before it's ripe, and if picked too late, it's not good either. There is a time for everything.

The Palm Sunday story reminds us that time doesn't wait...it marches on. That last week of Jesus' life must have felt like a whirlwind for Jesus and his followers. Everything happened so fast. I think it's possible that Jesus thought there were enough Jewish people in Jerusalem that, if he got them all whipped up, they could claim their own liberation, just like their ancestors did all those years ago in Egypt. Maybe they could really save themselves. Or maybe he knew all along that he was only planting seeds, that it would take more time and more people who were willing to risk their own comfort and safety to bring about liberation.

Each year, Christians all over the world gather with palms in hand to re-enact Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. And if we aren't careful, we will get so caught up in pageantry that we will miss the whole point. The point is not that Jesus was the hero riding in town to save all the people. The point is that the oppressive, unjust behavior that existed 2000 years ago still exists today. As followers of Jesus, we are called not just to re-enact what Jesus did but to actually do what Jesus did. We are called to resist injustice and speak truth to power. We must call out white supremacy, toxic masculinity, transphobia, book banning, economic inequity, and cruelty to immigrants. Sometimes, that means we make signs and march in the streets; sometimes, that means we write letters, write a check, or make phone calls. Now is the time. Now is the time for us to grow, to make choices about who we want to be and how we want the world to be, even if we are only planting seeds, even if we never see them bloom and produce fruit. Now is the time. And time does not wait.

Lately, as you can imagine, I've been thinking a lot about time and how there never seems to be enough of it. Life is short, and there is so much to do. What I've come to see is that our job is not to repair everything. Our job is to repair something. We are deeply connected to everyone who has come before us who, as much as we admire who they were and what they did, they didn't fix everything either, but they fixed something: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day, Harvey Milk, President Jimmy Carter, Jesus, and the people in your life whom you strive to be like.

When I was in Illinois, sitting with my mom at the hospital, she was sleeping, and I was feeling all the feelings. I loved my mom, and she loved me. She liked to be in control and she wasn't always self-aware enough to know how she came across. I, of course, am "she who will not be controlled," so you can imagine there was tension between us at times. My mom worked in banking at a time when women were receptionists in banks, but they were not in positions of leadership. She was. And she was really good at her job. She was really good at surviving and thriving in a field that was dominated by men. And she taught me that a woman's place is wherever she chooses to be. My mom is gone, but just as my grandpa stayed connected to my grandma by making sure that clock was wound, the work my mom did of creating space for women in the world will continue and I am grateful to be able to stay connected with her through that. And as followers of Jesus, we can best stay connected to him by continuing what he started, by nurturing the seeds he planted so long ago.

I will end this morning with a prayer written by Ken Untener in 1979. It has since become known as Oscar Romero's prayer. You will remember that Archbishop Romero was killed for daring to challenge the domination system of El Salvador. The official title of this prayer is "A Future Not Our Own."

It helps now and then to step back and take a long view.
The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of
saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.
No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession
brings perfection, no pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives include everything.

This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one
day will grow. We water the seeds already planted
knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects
far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of
liberation in realizing this.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning,
a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's
grace to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results, but that is the
difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not
messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.
Amen.