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Psalm 51:1-12

John 12:20-33

### “For Such a Time as This”

A colleague assisting with Presbyterian congregations in Cuba, wrote that in Cuba, at the Presbyterian Church Camp, there is a wooden sign nailed to a tree that says in Spanish, **“This may not be the best of times, but it is our time.”**

She reported that she had spent several weeks with Cuban children and their leaders and passed that sign numerous times.

During her months working with Cuban congregations she discovered something of how difficult it is for them to live with such little food, with families and relatives squeezed so tightly into small spaces, and the resources to teach children in church school are so scarce. **Certainly, for them it is not the best of times.**

But then this woman tells how that simple wooden sign was also so precious to read for she was experiencing the joy of the Cuban people,  
and thrilled at how they graciously extended Christian friendship,  
and how they found hope each day in God,  
and their commitment to serve their neighbors  
and nurture the faith of the next generation  
was unwavering.

Certainly, they were claiming their time/**this** time to witness in faith. **Though not the best of times, it was their time...for they recognized and celebrated God’s presence alive among them.**

I recall Carl Mazza years ago – as Meeting Ground was taking root affirming, “We are doing ministry here at Meeting Ground for such a time as this.” “For such a time as this” is a quote from the biblical Book of Esther (4:14). Queen Esther, who was Jewish –

a fact to which her husband the king had no clue —was facing a critical moment. The king was laying a plan to destroy the Jews. On behalf of her people, Queen Esther could seek to persuade the king against doing this, but to do so put her own life at risk, so she held-back.

Her mentor Mordecai told her, “Who knows? Perhaps you were made queen **for just such a time as this.**”

Jesus said something similar to “for such a time as this” in the last week of his life. As I read in our gospel lesson this morning, Jesus said, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. . . . And what should I say—“Father, save me from this hour”? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour” (John 12:23, 27).

Jesus makes this powerful declaration to his disciples not only about what will happen in these next days, but also about what it will mean. Once again he tries to explain to trusting, yet wavering followers what his mission really is all about:

**“The hour has come.”**

It is an hour to which his whole life has been leading.

It is an hour that drives Jesus to say, “My soul is troubled,” for it’s clear now that to live out God’s call to him, he will sacrifice his own life.

What he was facing would cause any person to be troubled.

It reveals to us that Jesus was not spared from the struggles, questions, pain, despair, and death that we know. What is true for him is true for us also.

Yet Jesus does not ask to be spared from this hour.

This hour bears the reason for his life.

This hour is the time for Jesus to fulfill his mission.

It is the time of his total and life-giving surrender to God.

Jesus reveals this urgency to some Greeks who wanted to meet with him... to see him. Jesus doesn’t reply, “I’m kinda busy right now” or “Tell them we’ll chat tomorrow afternoon.” **Rather, he insists the hour is at hand.**

If you really want to see me, to know who I am, see me on the cross.

It's as though no matter what we understand and believe about Jesus' ministry and teachings, we have not really seen Jesus unless and until we have seen him nailed to the cross.

That's when we begin to comprehend who Jesus truly is and what he does. It's when we see Christ on the cross that we begin to grasp the passion of his way and the heart of his reign on earth... and the eagerness of his invitation to us.

As Jesus takes up his cross, he is illustrating his own teaching: "There is no greater love than this, than to lay down your life for your friends."

Standing beneath the cross of Jesus we see a revelation about God we can see nowhere else.

We see, as the Apostle Paul wrote, the proof of God's amazing love "in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Paul also wrote, "I know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

Paul insisted on the centrality of the cross because only a God who suffers with us can save us.

Over the centuries, different theories have developed as to what Jesus' death on the cross accomplished. These are called theories of atonement, none of which I find fully satisfactory.

Instead I affirm,

**Jesus died not to change God, but Jesus died to change us.**

Jesus' death did not make God's love possible; it made God's love **visible.**"

Jesus embodied God's reconciling love through a life of self-emptying on our behalf,

And it was accomplished in a final, free, surrendering love in his death.

Of course, we see Jesus' crucifixion after the fact, through post-resurrection eyes. The only reason the cross carries such powerful meaning for us is because the one who suffered and died is the *risen* Christ.

If salvation could ever be through a cross alone, there have been enough crosses to save the world a million times over.

On one day alone, along Roman roads, crosses were lined up farther than the eye could see, as thousands of rebellious, defiant men (mostly men) were executed.

Many times since, crosses have been raised and people executed cruelly and unjustly.

Salvation, health, wholeness however, cannot come from crosses alone.

Salvation, health, wholeness can come only from a cross whose body hanging there has some future.

Salvation, health, wholeness has to come from someone a cross cannot hold.

Salvation, health, wholeness has to come from someone of whom a cross cannot terminate. . . .

Salvation, health, wholeness cannot come from crosses that **end** something.

Salvation, health, wholeness has to come from that rare cross that is the **beginning** of something.”

Jesus describes this through a parable.

He says, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life will lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:24–25).

That is strong language: “hate their life in this world.”

That doesn’t mean hating ourselves.

Rather, it means hating any alienation from God that is in our lives and in this world.

Jesus teaches that death must precede life.

We must die to all that is within us that separates us from God and one another if we are to bear new life as his disciples.

A young woman whose husband died suddenly and left her with two young children, sometime later wrote a letter to her pastor. She wrote, “I discovered that the faith I had prior to my husband’s death no longer worked in my life. . . .

I had reached a point where the road had ended,

and the way was unlit. And when that happens," she wrote, "I discovered that it matters profoundly what kind of God you know. . . .

Now, my faith has a new shape and a new meaning, and my life a new tune."

She ended her letter saying, "Tragic circumstances have left me in the best possible place . . . on my knees, at the foot of the cross."

There is no better place to be.

There is no better time than now to follow the One who gave his life for us.

He died ... He lives for such a time as this.

For such a people as us.