

The Time Has Come

March 17, 2024 at First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

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Texts: John 12: 20-36

All week long, I've had the thumping bass line, steady snare, and epic chorus of the eighties rock and roll classic "Beds are Burning" coursing through my mind! It's by Midnight Oil, an Australian band who, in addition to being world-class rockers, continue to be climate justice warriors and advocates for Aboriginal and Indigenous rights. In the original music video - you can google it later - the band is cruising together on an open road in a dusty Toyota Land Cruiser flatbed. They're surveying the desert outback, while belting out the following lyrics in angry protest of land theft and environmental degradation:

Out where the river broke
The bloodwood and the desert oak
Holden wrecks and boilin' diesels
Steam in forty-five degrees
(Then the pre-chorus...)
The time has come to say fair's fair
To pay the rent, to pay our share
The time has come, a fact's a fact
It belongs to them, let's give it back
(And the chorus...)
How can we dance when our earth is turnin'?
How do we sleep while our beds are burnin'?
How can we dance when our earth is turnin'?
How do we sleep while our beds are burnin'?

Amen? The time has come! And, for starters, I wonder if you could hear a similar line in today's reading. Thus far in John and throughout the gospels, we've heard Jesus say, "My hour has not yet come!" He says just that to his mother at Cana in Chapter 2. In chapter 4, he repeats it to his disciples! "My time has not yet come." In Chapter 7, we learn that the authorities were about to arrest him but [quote]"no one laid hands on him, because his hour had yet to come." The same line is used again in chapter 8. Yet, by Chapter 12 here in John, something has shifted. Our passage starts as a classic "come to Jesus" moment! It appears that "some Greeks" are seeking him out this time as the Passover festival was getting underway in Jerusalem. The Greeks here symbolize a wider world and broader reach for his message, beyond his hometown in Nazareth where he taught and healed up near the Galilee. Gone are his garage band days; he's ready to bring his message to a global stage. And it's here, in this moment, that we learn, directly from him in verse 23, "The Hour has come..." The time has come. From here on, it's all eyes on him as he enters into that first Holy Week, his last supper, his agony, suffering, and death on the cross right through to his rising on Easter. All of this is assumed when he says: "The Hour has come. "And the full verse adds something here, and it's what we've all been waiting for, sort of! It says: "the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

Sounds pretty good at first, sort of, and eventually, for him and for us. We at least know it sounds important. But what does he mean here? And did his listeners get it then? It might be a little like an old eighties rock song – we can dance and sing those soul-pumping lyrics for years and still have no clue what the song is about! Truthfully, I used to blast that Midnight Oil song with my friends on Cape Cod beaches as a teenager. I knew every word but had no idea that it was about indigenous land rights. It just sounded good!

For Jesus, the time has come, and it's clear to us now that he means the time of his death! Imagine any of us coming to Jesus at *that* moment - when there's no more hiding it, no more so-called "messianic secrets," meeting him for the first time when his persecution and death are utterly imminent! To make the point, in some Bibles, the subheading for this section is the "End of Jesus's Public Ministry!" And yet what follows the recognition that his hour has arrived is a series of enigmatic lines. He talks about grains that must die to bear fruit, then about those loving their lives *in this world* losing them, and those hating their lives keeping them. He seems to be putting forth a disparaging vision of "life in this world" as compared to the deeper and more lasting life lived through the lens of God in Christ's eternal light and love! If you are thinking, "Dan, you're starting to lose me here," I don't blame ya! There is a ton to unpack in this passage! I researched it, and consulted my most trusted commentaries, hoping for something to light up that could help me crystallize a bite-sized take-away! Maybe it was just my frame of mind, but, no dice – I found bupkis! Every attempt at interpretation only made it harder to understand. (The experience reminded me of what my staunchly atheist, philosophy-major college housemate once said to me during my senior year after picking up and rifling through the Harvard Divinity School course catalog that I had just proudly received in the mail. He said: "looks like a bunch of theological mumbo-jumbo to me but good luck with it!" The fact remains: Jesus's language here is more than a little confounding.

For today, let's not get lost in the theological rabbit holes of all the words and instead pay attention to what Jesus *does* when he realizes his time has come! Because after all, the time is coming for us, too! I'm not talking about my leaving here. I'm talking about the time for "life in this world"! The time for any of our lives in this world! According to the Doomsday Clock from the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists based at the University of Chicago, we are 90 seconds to midnight which means humanity is closer to destruction than we've been since the clock began in 1947! The diesel's still boiling. Nations are collapsing. Indeed, how can we sleep when the beds are burning, and the earth is turning in profound and potentially irreversible ways. Personally, I've been finding a magnesium supplement to be a bit of help, but how bout you? Jokes aside, I think Jesus can help us here with holding the weight of our times! So, yes, setting aside the confounding words, what does he do? It's WJDJ? What did Jesus do Jesus do when the time has come for him?

First, God bless him, he leans into his vulnerability! He acknowledges that "Now my soul is troubled!" Let's pause right there. This is Jesus telling us that *his* soul is troubled, not the other way around! Imagine again coming to Jesus and hearing that kind of honesty and tenderness! He's keeping it real with us here. He knows the human realities of suffering, pain and death are deeply troubling if not terrifying and sometimes unbearable! He's telling us these things were in no way easy for him. This makes me trust him, all the more. For here we find powerful permission, consolation, companionship in his example of *not denying* the grief and turmoil within or around.

What does he do next? He embraces his calling and accepts the hard road ahead. Did you hear the amazing thing he said here? “What, you think I should ask God to save me from this hour?” Yea, why not? Many of us turn to our parents when we are stuck! “No,” he says! He knows there are no shortcuts! It’s his path, his cross, his responsibility and calling to see it through.

Next, what does he do? He prays. And what does he pray? “God, glorify your name!” The time has come for his suffering and death. One would think if ever there were a moment for a little me-centered attention, this would be it! And he does let people come and serve him. In fact, Mary just anointed his feet with costly oil at the top of Chapter 12, and yet here he prays and ultimately points to God! He knows this wide mystery of life is always about more than him. He knows his true calling is to live his life in utter response to God’s love and grace and so to give God thanks and glory at every turn! And herein he becomes a channel to allow something greater to happen through him.

And finally, as soon as he’s done praying, he listens and hears a voice as from heaven! The word for voice here, *bat kol*, can also be translated as ‘thunder,’ as in Psalm 29 verse 3: “The voice of the LORD echoes above the sea. The God of glory thunders.” We hear this same voice only two other times in the gospel. The first is at his baptism, just before he begins his public ministry, when the Spirit tells him you are my beloved. The second is atop the mountain of the transfiguration, when the voice says virtually the same thing: “This is my beloved, listen to him!” And now here, for a third time, at the end of his journey, this voice of thunder and glory echoes a final assurance of his belovedness! Ultimately, Jesus tells his followers that this voice, and I would add this time, has come, for their sake not for his! It’s a voice and a time of grace and glorification, an assurance of the belovedness of every human being, and yet we also learn that it’s a voice, and a time, of judgment! For *now*, he says, is the judgment of *this* world! We might read “this world” here as “the system,” or those *systems* of patriarchy, racism, oppression, and military prison industrial complexes! They are also the systems of those internal, psychological complexes and demons we are all called to wrestle with and drive out!

So, the time has come not only for him! The time has come for “this world” - this word of land theft, climate catastrophe, gang violence, genocide. The time has come! A fact is a fact! And... the harsh and dark realities of this world, and of death itself, can only be muted and transformed by the power, love and light of God!

“The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified!” It happens whenever any of us can do as Jesus did!

1. Be vulnerable and honest about our human struggle.
2. Embrace our callings and responsibilities, and don’t try to deny, distract or escape from the realities of suffering and death.
3. Take it to God in prayer.
4. Listen for the truth of your belovedness and trust God’s righteous judgment of life in this world.
5. Seek to channel God’s light and love for the world!

The time has come! It’s like catching lightning in a bottle, like catching the full force of God’s glory and thunder in his very body! He knows his readiness and power to stand tall, to be a lightning rod that at once receives the full force of God’s love, light and justice and at the same time, absorbs, transforms and drives out the rulers of this world! Or, if you prefer, feel free to imagine the energy of a Midnight Oil rock concert at Gillette! Indeed, how can we sleep? We have this light and lightning strength in us too,

for we too are beloved children of God, beloved children of the light! Whether it's 90 seconds to midnight, in this upcoming Holy Week, or a thousand ages from now, may we too be inspired to act with such faith and courage! Amen.

