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“The Time of Our Lives” **Sermon on John 12:20-33**

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The Gospel of John has two time zones. There's Chronos time, as in the word chronological, sequential time. Today is St. Patrick's Day. Tonight, spring break ends. Tomorrow is Monday, the traffic returns. Earthly time.

The other time zone is Kairos time. It is the time that comes from above. It's God's time. It is a quality time. “A splendid time was had by all!”

And, in the Gospel of John, these two times zones often collide.

For example, in the second chapter of John we hear... “On the third day, there was a wedding in Cana...” (Chronos, 3rd day, Measured time.) But, suddenly in the story the Chronos collides with the Kairos. We hear it precisely when the mother of Jesus says, “They have no wine.” And Jesus replies, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother tells the servants: “Do whatever he tells you!”

None of that makes any sense unless it's a tip-off that the time is changing. It's Kairos time! And Jesus turned the water into wine, and a splendid time was had by all.

“Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” Aside from those words being no way to speak to your mother, Jesus mentions his hour repeatedly throughout this gospel. Jesus said, “Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming.” Jesus said, “The hour is coming.” Jesus said, “The hour is coming.” “They tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not come.” “His hour had not come.” “His hour had not come.”

Until now. You will hear in our scripture today a collision between Chronos and Kairos. You'll hear what time it is.

John 12: 20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, 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 lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. 'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Often in the Chronos of our days, we can ponder our existential questions. It may lead to a crisis of sorts. "What is life all about?" "Why am I here?" "What's my purpose?"

The "empty nesters" are but for a moment, empty nesters, because the career choice of the third child was not the right choice and he has moved back in to eat what's in the refrigerator and take over the remote control.

The 45-year-old wakes, and realizes she's taken a road she no longer wants to travel. Ah, welcome to the midlife crisis.

Meanwhile, the clock ticks and you're 67-years old. "What are you going to do in retirement?" "I wish I knew what I was going to do. Without a job, I'm not sure who I am."

Not knowing what you're supposed to do in life - it can be a crisis moment.

Jesus has that moment in scripture, just for a moment, in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The Midnight of the Soul happens in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus looks at the road he's traveling and sees the cross getting ever larger, ever closer. "I don't want to die."

Now isn't that the truth? Given a choice between life and death, most of you have chosen life every time.

For example, when Guy Griffith says, "How are we going to get to the game," I'm quick to reply, "I'll drive." I don't say that to be kind. I say it because I love life. His wife, Amy, will back me up on this.

But you life-lovers do the same thing. Given a choice, you eat your vegetables, get your exercises, see your doctor, say a prayer when you board the plane, save for retirement, you love life.

Now, saying all of that, I have on a number of occasions been with families who are dealing with the end of life. They don't want to go there. But we live in a time of the living will, and it's one thing to sign the living will. "Do not resuscitate." And while that looks good on paper, when it's your mom or your dad or the love of your life....

I have been in that room that is just off the critical care unit. I've walked in there with the family when the doctors lay out their case. "We can increase this, but it will cause that." "We can decrease this, but that will increase the other thing." "We're really at an impasse." And there is a pause, and the Kleenex box in the middle of the table gets passed around, as the whole family comes to the realization that there are things worse than dying. "Mom would never want to suffer."

The decision to choose death is right, but it is painful.

"Take this cup from me, but Lord, let it be according to your will and not my will." Surely, that prayer has to be agony for God. I can't imagine wanting to see your child suffer. Who does God talk to in times of trouble?

"Daddy, take this cup from me."

That Midnight of the Soul moment happens in Matthew, Mark, and Luke... but you did not hear it today in John's Gospel. There's no pleading with God. "Take this cup from me." Quite the opposite. Jesus said, "What should I say, 'Father, save me from this hour? NO! It is for this reason I have come to this hour!'"

No hesitation! Jesus knows his purpose. He is defined by his purpose. He is empowered by his purpose. It is as if Jesus sees the whole picture. Jesus sees all of time at once. Past. Present. Future. And he sees it all wrapped up in faith.

I can't seem to get that in my head. I can get part of it in my head. I can tell my faith story in retrospect, my faith journey. You can do the same. Looking back over your life, you can see how you've made it to this day, and you know, there's no other way to explain it. It's a God thing. Presently, I can look into the past and see God. Presently, I can look forward and wonder, where's God in any of it? The future is nerve-wracking. Every morning, I read the headlines and, "Lord have Mercy!" Makes you want to buy gold, build a bunker, and hunker down. But without Tick Tok videos, what are we going to do? Talk to each other?

Jesus sees the whole picture as Good News. He knows what was, what is, what is to come. Past, present, and future, all wrapped up into one time. It is a place of love and truth and life. Imagine having such a view where you can give your life and know that it leads only to more life.

I saw on the news this week a story about people who have decided on their purpose in life. The story was about the City of New York inducting a new class of city firefighters - "New York's bravest." I don't think that would have made the national news at all if one of the newly inducted firefighters wasn't the son of a chef. A chef who once worked at a restaurant at the very top of the World Trade Center.

They interviewed him. He said, "My father died on 9/11." Chronos. "I decided that I wanted to be a firefighter because of the people who tried and died trying to save him." He's looking back in time. "Those brave heroes that died in that building...." He's looking back in

time. "I want to help people as well." He's looking into the future. Would you be so bold as to talk him out of it? They died trying to save your father. That could be you. Do something safe.

"What am I to cry? 'Father, save me from this hour.' No! It is for this reason I have come to this hour."

There out of smoke and flame comes a figure holding a child in his arms. Who can talk him out of that? Climbing up the stairs when the whole world is going down the stairs to get out of the building. Who can talk him out of that? "God bless you, young man."

The best thing about the news is that there are people in this world who believe in Good News. The best thing about the world is that there are people who so love the world. They see what's wrong and don't hunker down. But they go into the world with a Word! You see, with all the horrible news in the world, there's been no better time to be the Church!

I know. I know, people think the church is taking its last breath. Time to pull the plug.

I have found myself on a Committee of Presbytery called the Property Working Group. Doesn't that sound theological? Doesn't that sound Kairos? What that amounts to is that congregations in our presbytery are closing down. They are not sustainable. It is time to pull the plug. The property must be sold. When church property is sold, the money doesn't go to the last member standing, which always seems to come as quite a shock to the last member standing.

It goes back to the Presbytery. So, what is happening is that as congregations die, the Presbytery gets richer and richer, and now that we have an investment strategy it is doing quite well, if you measure time in money. Chronos.

I heard the other day, and to tell you the truth, I'm quite haunted by it, that there are 4,000 children in Nashville who are homeless. Can you believe that? Four thousand children that are homeless. That can't be right. It's not right. Lord, knows, it's not right.

I went down to an organization with Jackie Shrago that helps these children get clothing and food. Their lifeline is through the schools. I met a woman, white, in her mid-forties. Chronos. She was folding used school uniforms. She told a story about a snowstorm that went on for about a week, which kept her from getting to work, she could not pay the rent, and she was forced out of her apartment. She lived in a car with her child. "You don't want to tell anyone about it, because there is the fear that they'll take your child away." Four thousand children. That can't be right.

It would be silly or a crime if the church died holding on to all that money.

What are we to say... "Lord, save us from this hour?" No. For this reason, we have come to this hour." It's why we're here. We have this Word... the Word that was, and is, and is to come. And so, we live it out. And a splendid time was had by all.