

Reflection for Epiphany II Year A

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Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-12; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

Sunday, January 15th, 2023

Did you spend time in your early adult years growing up and searching for your purpose in life? What were you looking for? Over three thousand years ago, Alexander the Great spent his twenties conquering the world. By the age of thirty, he created one of the largest empires in history, having never lost a battle. Military academies throughout the world still teach his tactics. Unfortunately, his premature death, at the age of only thirty-two, stopped the further expansion of his empire.

As it was with many events in his life, Alexander the Great's death, too, became a source of legends that still excite our minds today. When he was dying (323 BCE), he had three wishes: the best doctors should carry his coffin; the wealth he had accumulated – gold, silver, precious jewels – should be scattered along the procession to the cemetery; his hands should be let loose, hanging outside the coffin for all to see.

His followers were surprised and asked him to explain his unusual requests. He said, "Even the best doctors can't save you from death; all the wealth acquired on Earth stays on Earth; we come to this world empty-handed and we leave it empty-handed, having exhausted the most precious treasure – Time." (adapted, part quoted from various sources, including "The Last Wishes of Alexander the Great" leader.co.za; "Three wishes of a dying King" storyofsouls.com; "5 Amazing Legends About the Death of Alexander the Great" shorthistory.com)

Time is limited. We can produce more wealth, but we cannot produce more time. When we give someone our time, we actually give a portion of our life that we will never take back. Our time is our life!

Last week, we heard Matthew's version of the Baptism of Jesus.

This week, John's gospel takes us, in time, to the day after Jesus is baptized. John has declared Jesus to be the "Lamb of God." and the "Son of God" and describes his vision of the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, landing on Jesus.

And then the reading takes on a new theme when Jesus offers "the most personal gift to humanity – Himself...Jesus was interested in those He came into contact with..and [invited them] into a relationship with God." (Ruth Clemence, biblestudytools.com)

►³⁹ "Come and see," he said. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day.

He recruits His first two disciples and asks them, "What are you looking for?" This is a fundamental question we need to ask ourselves: how do we respond to this invitation to look into our own souls and ask ourselves what are we looking for in life? The two disciples don't answer but ask Jesus a question: "Teacher, where are you staying?" This question sounds odd to us, but we have to remember that during his public ministry, Jesus had "no fixed address." In biblical times, when a Jew asked a rabbi where he was staying, they were essentially saying, "I want to learn from you. I want to enter into a discipleship relationship with you." (afreshperspective.blogspot.com)

Then Jesus responds with “Come and see,” an invitation into a place of belonging. Come and see who fulfills our deepest hopes and needs. And at about four o’clock in the afternoon they go with him for a day, accepting his invitation, and they are transformed.

“It was about four o’clock in the afternoon.” (v39)

Time. Relevance. Meaning.

Every Sunday our service is scheduled to begin at 9 am here at Christ Church and 11 am at St. George. We may not begin on time, but we start “at about” the beginning of these hours.

“Time matters in this story, not just to mark time, but to remind us of God’s time. That God entered into time when He didn’t have to. That God chose to be limited by time when He didn’t need to. That God decided time matters [to us, His children].” *

So what is the importance of that sentence in our Gospel reading today?

Is it about light and darkness and what they represent?

Is it about being in the light of the Word?

Is it about believing or not believing?

Is it about the time of day? Is it still light? Is darkness approaching?

Other versions of verse 39 describe the time as “the tenth hour.” (KJV, OJB, RSV, ESV)



The Jewish method of computing time involved dividing time into twelve equal parts, beginning at sunrise; therefore the tenth hour is four o’clock (CEV, NCV, NRSV) or about two hours before sunset.

But we have to consider what Gospel writer is the source of today’s reading. John’s account of the [life of Jesus Christ is, at its heart, the incarnation, the belief that the Word became flesh, that God assumed a human nature and became a man in the form of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the second person of the Trinity.] *

Jesus knew that time mattered, even as a child. When he was twelve, according to Luke, he said, “I must be about my Father’s business.” (KJV 2:49)

During his short thirty-three years, Jesus took time to work, to pray, to preach, to reach out and gather in new disciples and believers, to be with friends, and to be with strangers. He even took time to pray, forgive, and comfort as he was dying on the cross.

So, time does matter. Our lives happen with time.

I remember the day I met my husband in high school and the hour when I walked down the aisle on our wedding day. Important events have precise times – I remember the exact time when our sons were born.

When Jesus’ first two disciples met Him, the time of the event had to be recorded. How can that moment ever be forgotten? I know when I experienced my “four o’clock in the afternoon” moment: it was when I met Jesus again: when I walked into Christ Church on Palm Sunday, April 5th, 2009 to attend the 8:30 Said Communion service with Rev. Ruth Knapp.

Time anchors the important events in our lives.

“It was about four o’clock in the afternoon” when John’s followers were invited by Jesus to “Come and see,” becoming Jesus’ first disciples, brothers Andrew and Simon whom Jesus renamed ‘Peter.’

"Come and see" meaning to seek Jesus, find Jesus, and know Jesus. And here we come and see and walk together in deepening and sharing our faith.

Jesus also stayed with Andrew and Peter "that day." (v39)

This is another important part of seeking Jesus. He will always have the time, and the interest, to speak to those who really want to be with Him.

No matter who we are, rich or poor, we are all given something in common that we can spend. Each of us has been given the gift of time. One author wrote, "Time is a strange commodity: we can't save it, retrieve it, relive it, stretch it, borrow it, loan it, stop it or store it, but can only use it or lose it."



Psalm 90 describes it best: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." (v12)

Alexander the Great was right: Time is our most precious treasure because it is limited.

"It was about four o'clock in the afternoon."

"Presence in time is the promise of Epiphany. The incarnation anticipates and even demands timely matters. Why" Because time matters to God and *our* times matter deeply to God." *

"What are you looking?" Jesus asked. God gave all of us a gift of time today to invite us into His life, to come and see. God wants all of us to have our four o'clock moments.

Amen.

* Quoted/adapted with permission, Karoline Lewis, workingpreacher.org