

Mark 6:6b-13; 6:30-34 (NIV)

TIME – is the harvest sown and is it ready?

The two passages from Mark's gospel this morning sandwich the telling of the death of John the Baptist and the reading tells us of the sending out of the disciples and their returning.

The reading contains much I could speak on –

- The commissioning of the twelve – as they are sent, the message they carry and the deeds undertaken are an extension of Jesus' own words and deeds.
- The fulfilment of Jesus' sending of the twelve is a time specific commission – that it is not a tell all - for all time.
- The lack of equipment they are to travel with – the need to carry things lightly, and not be burdened – for we will be equipped for our God journey's.
- Shaking the dust from their feet where not welcomed – and the theological meaning of this, the understanding of Jewish purity in gentile lands.
- The driving out of demons and healing – what that means and it's relevance today.
- The trip across the lake as Jesus and the disciples are pursued around it by people desperate to be with Jesus – because *'they were like a shepherd without a sheep'*

I could spend time in these areas, but I'm not going to (maybe go and reflect this week on some of these points and on this passage).

Today I want to talk about time - our time, what we do with our time.

But first here are a few clichés about time

"time and tide wait for no man" (or woman) (Geoffrey Chaucer);

"Lost time is never found again" (Benjamin Franklin);

"How did it get so late so soon? Its night before its afternoon. December is here before its June. My goodness how the time has flown. How did it get so late so soon?" (Dr. Seuss).

And ...

If you are still talking about what you did yesterday, you haven't done much today...

Time consists of

History – time past we cannot change.

Future – time we can plan for but not really know what we will face

The present – what lies directly in front of us – the immediacy of now.

There is a natural flow to time as future becomes present and disappears into the past...

... this morning I want to consider another flow of time – that of the ‘Rhythms of the Christian Life’ – a kind of movement through time as we journey in faith, creating history as we move into future, by living closely with the Lord in the present.

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In the Gillespie Centre, on the glass window to one of the meeting rooms we have the following text from The Message paraphrase Bible – from Matthew 11.28-30

*28-30 “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. **Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.** I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”*

...Learn the unforced rhythms of grace

In our reading the disciples

- are **called to Jesus**
- Are **sent out by Jesus**
- With **authority from Jesus**
- **They Serve Jesus in their mission**, and
- Then they **return to Jesus to speak with him**, telling what they have done,
- And he takes them to **find quiet, and rest.**

These are rhythms of grace.

So, as we journey in our series on stewardship, and move this week to time - what can we learn about the ways of God so that we don’t either turn to laziness or at the opposite end – overwork and burn out?

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What happens when we are walking the Christian life with Jesus – if we are really honouring him, walking as he calls us to, learning his rhythms – listening in prayer to what He calls us to.

Quite simply – shalom – peace / wholeness

This is all about spending time with Him.

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I would argue time apart from Jesus, not allowing Him into parts of your daily life is destructive.

If you trust Him as Lord and Saviour, why would He not be in all parts of your life – at all times? What might we be trying to hide?

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So three points to consider in this reading

1. Waiting and receiving
2. Planting / Harvesting – action
3. Rest & Recuperation

1. Waiting and Receiving

So it starts with Him – waiting on Jesus and receiving from Him.

Jesus first calls the twelve.

Do you ever not hear someone calling you? Or have you ever called out to your spouse or partner, or a child and they've not heard you – even when you're a couple of meters away. It probably because you or they are not attuned – not listening.

When Jesus called the twelve, they heard and responded – have you developed the sense of hearing Him?

It is a sense developed in prayer, in conversation with God. Only when conversation is two way is it real – and that involves listening.

So, Jesus calls, the disciples hear – and they respond to His call...

... and so come the words of instruction

- *Take nothing for the journey except a staff*
- *Wear sandals but not an extra shirt.*
- *Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town.*
- *if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.*

Distinct instructions are given by Jesus. The disciples know what the mission is and how they are to go about it; how they should be equipped and what might face them....

And we hear the mission is wrapped up in the authority of Jesus.

Before they are sent – He gives *them authority over impure spirits.*

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So, this time spent with Jesus – this waiting, is not pointless hanging about but as time of receiving, of instruction and equipping.

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Is that something you are very good at – spending time with Christ in prayer?

- Quietly listening for His still small voice?

- Nudging you to action, worried that he may call you into something for which you feel ill equipped, perhaps not expecting He will equip you with all you need.

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Waiting on the Lord is important – in the activity of prayer – talking **and** listening to God.

It is also a time of getting ready to go – knowing the mission and what you are to carry.

The disciples were to carry little – just their staff and the clothes they were wearing.

But for your call it may require more.

Emma doesn't head of to do her work with Trypraying without books and packs to hand. I don't come to preach and teach without my notes, my Bible, or whatever else I need if I am leading a conference or a course. I wouldn't head out to take a home communion without the bread or the wine, just as many of you may have roles that require you to be prepared to do your job.

So, a question is – what is it God is calling you to and what do you need to take with you, either practically or metaphorically?

Pray – ask God to speak to you and listen for His response. Let Him equip and authorise you.

Use this time of waiting, and receive from Him

2. Planting / Harvesting – a time for action

Then you get to go and do.

They went out and preached that people should repent. ¹³ They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

Heading out as Jesus had called them, in pairs, the disciples carry out their tasks of preaching repentance, and healing of illnesses and the ministry of deliverance.

What about us today. Are we about the Lord's work?

Are we involved in carrying the message of repentance?

Are we helping to heal peoples hurts and pains – comforting them where we can?

Planting and harvesting are the ends of the busy season for farmers. Just like the Christian life there is a call to plant the seed of the Gospel in people's hearts – our neighbours / friends / children / family. Then there will God will be a harvest time too.

If we are open to God we will see these periods of activity in life – these necessary busy times.

I love taking the courses that I have done so far – the Bible Course; The Natural Evangelism Course and now The Prayer Course – but it involves time, energy and giving of myself – and the only way I can achieve that is by following the pattern I am talking about this morning.

Before running the course – I will have prayed and listened to what God is calling me to. What He is wanting me to lead the people of GMC on.

And on that subject – what God is leading us to, I believe he is taking us on a journey – a journey of growth in our faith and ultimately a journey to be a growing and united church. It's why he humbled this church in the past, and calls us all to honour him. Calls us to welcome those who come seeking him...

And, so for me when I have listened, waited on God in prayer,

... I then get to go and do....

But in the doing can come fatigue.

We are not Jesus – the perfect Son of God.

We are human, broken and even at our best we can struggle in the doing, which is why the third part is so importance.

3. Rest & Recuperation

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

It is good to report back, to share of success and failure.

Emma and I every day try to put aside time to share what happened in our day. The good, the bad and the ugly – and in doing so we have the support and input of one another... but we also pray. We need to, because if we wholly rely on our strength, well then, we've had it.

Jesus is the one we truly rest in and upon.

Jesus says –

- come with me
- by yourselves
- to a quiet place
- and get some rest

COME with me, with the Lord – How you might ask? Well follow the instruction He gives – find somewhere quiet, by yourself – and pray.

Are you getting the point yet – Prayer is central to all this. Two-way communication with God, through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit is the way to shalom, to peace and wholeness.

Time with God is well spent.

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For me the metaphor of harvest is important. The sowing of seed, the leaving to rest, the work of the sunshine and rain, the ripening, the harvest time and the production into food – it's all about the rhythms of the seasons, the natural environment.

These rhythms are echoes of time with God – of waiting and receiving / of planting and harvest / of rest and recuperation – it has a natural equilibrium about it – but only when in tandem with God.

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So I haven't talked much about stewardship. And in this season on Stewardship, what about our time?

You might expect me to ask of you – what time do you give to church? And ask for more of it – well I not going to – that is up to you – the sign-up board is at the back, to prayer about, and seek what God may want you to drop and what he may want you pick up.

But that is not my main point.

You might also think at harvest my point may be about the spiritual fields of faith that need many workers to bring in the harvest for God – and we need your time to do that.

But that's not my point either.

My point is this...

Have you found your rhythm with God?

Have you truly found that relationship with Him in prayer – where you find him calling you to action, and then going back to find rest in Him?

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If we as church can find that. If you individually can find that; if we all can find that relationship in prayer – the unforced rhythms of grace – then we will truly be honouring God, glorifying Him and he will build his Kingdom here.