**For Such a Time As This**

**Esther 4:1-14; Mark 1:14-20**

10/1/15

Thought for Meditation:

Time constantly threatens to become our great enemy. In our contemporary society it often seems that not money but time enslaves us… Indeed, it seems that many people feel they no longer have time, but that time has them. *Henri* *Nouwen Clowning In Rome p94-5*

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Many of you have probably heard the story of the man who was talking with God. “God, isn’t it true that for you a thousand years is just like a second?” God said “Yes.” “Is it also true for you that a million dollars is just like a penny?” Again, God said “Yes.” “Well, God, could I have a million dollars?” God replied, “Sure, in a second!”

That old joke points to two of three resources that are part of stewardship – time and treasure. The third resource is our talents. Today is the first of three Sundays in which we are going to focus on stewardship. Today we are going to look at our time, next week at our treasure, and two weeks from now we will look at our talents. That third week, October 18th, is also the week that we are asking you to bring back your pledge cards, as part of your stewardship.

When it comes to our treasure, the money we have, there is a wide gap between how much the richest people have and how much the poorest have. Most of us are somewhere in the middle, but if we are honest, we probably have times when we wish we had more money. We get jealous of those who have multi-million, or even billion dollar incomes. Chances are that some of us even get jealous of the talents that other people have. There are certain gifts and abilities that I wish God had given to me. However, when it comes to time, everyone has exactly the same amount. No one has more, or less, than 24 hours a day and seven days a week. To help us think about our time I want us to look at two passages in the Bible.

Esther is not as well-known as some Old Testament stories, but it is a fascinating story. An interesting fact about this book is that God is never mentioned. There are enemies who are trying to destroy God’s people, but God doesn’t do anything in the story and the people who are being attacked don’t even pray to God. The word “God” is not even in the book. Some people call it a secular story. I would suggest that it is about the hidden work of God.

The story is set in Persia, modern day Iran, in the fifth century B.C. Esther was a young Jewish girl whose parents had died. She was raised by her cousin, Mordecai. Esther was a beautiful young woman who, through a series of events, became queen of Persia, the wife of King Xerxes.

There are three main characters in the story, Esther and Mordecai, and a man named Haman. He was an Amalekite who became one of the high servants of the king. Other people were expected to bow down to Haman and honor him. However, Mordecai refused to bow down to him. Haman was not at all happy with that lack of respect, so he set out to get revenge. He made plans not only to kill Mordecai, but to destroy the entire Jewish nation, the people of God. Haman laid out a subtle plot and took it to the king, and it was approved. That’s where we get to our passage in chapter four.

When Mordecai learned about the plan to kill all the Jews he was terrified and grief-stricken. He went to Esther and asked her to go talk to the king to see if he would do something. Esther was very understandably hesitant. The only time a person was allowed to see the king was when the king requested their presence. To go to the king without an invitation meant that you would probably be killed. When Mordecai heard her objection he responded with one of the best lines from the book of Esther. Essentially, what Mordecai said was this:

You are a Jew. Maybe, just maybe, you have become the queen, the king’s beloved wife, *for such a time as this* (Esther 4:14 – emphasis mine).

“For such a time as this.” In other words, God gives us time as an opportunity for ministry. Our passage in Mark has a similar message. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus says “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe the good news” (Mark 1:15). Through Jesus God has entered the world. Therefore it is **time** to act out our faith. It is **time** to live out what we believe. Jesus went on to call his first disciples, Simon and Andrew, James and John. He invited them to join his ministry. The time we have provides us with an opportunity for ministry, to honor God and to build the church.

Those of you who have been in my office know that I have an antique striking clock in there. I love clocks. We have five striking clocks at our house and someday I’ll inherit more from my parents. At one point they had fourteen or fifteen striking clocks.

If I had an unlimited amount of time I would love to study time. It is a topic that has always fascinated me. There are a number of themes that are connected with time: Sabbath – how we balance the rhythms of time; Busyness – which is filling our time with activities through which we hope to find meaning and purpose; Boredom – which is not from having too much time but from not finding any meaning in the activities we do in time; Procrastination – which is not recognizing the holiness of time.

Obviously, I can’t cover everything there is to say about time. Let me share with you one thought. The time we have is a gift from God. How we spend our time is part of our response to God’s grace. In other words, how you spend your time says a lot about your relationship with God. To be faithful stewards we need to spend our time in ways that honor God and build up the church.

That does not mean that everyone is called to spend twenty hours a week at the church. Some of us are called into full-time ministry, but not everyone. However, everyone is called to use some of their time for ministry.

There are probably a number of reasons people don’t use their time for ministry. One reason is that many people are not convinced that the things they do make any difference. Edward Kimball taught Sunday school at his church. He taught a class of teenage boys. Sometimes he actually went out to visit the boys where they lived or worked.

One Sunday a seventeen-year-old boy showed up to his class. His name was Dwight. He was rather rough around the edges. He wasn’t educated, and sometimes his anger would explode and he curse up a storm. Edward didn’t know how to build a relationship with Dwight and wondered if anything would help. Dwight worked for his uncle at a shoe store. Edward decided to go visit him at the store.

He walked to the store but didn’t go in. He wondered if it was worth his time. Finally he went in. Dwight was in the back wrapping shoes and putting them on shelves. Edward went up to him and put his hand on his shoulder. He mumbled a few words about Christ’s love and then left. He left thinking that he had probably wasted his time.

After Edward left, right there in the store, Dwight committed his life to Christ. Dwight’s last name was Moody. Dwight Moody was the most successful evangelist of the 19th century. Some people estimate that Dwight Moody preached to a hundred million people and travelled over a million miles, in the days before cars and planes.

In 1879 Moody preached a sermon that was heard by a young man named F.B. Meyer. Meyer committed his life to Christ and became a pastor. Later on, Meyer preached a sermon that was heard by a young man named J.W. Chapman. He also became a Christian and a preacher. Chapman started an outreach ministry to professional baseball players. One of those players was Billy Sunday. He became a Christian and eventually became one of the best known evangelists at the beginning of the 20th century.

Billy Sunday held revivals all over the country. One of those revivals was in Charlotte, North Carolina. It was so successful that leaders from the community of Charlotte invited Sunday to come back. He couldn’t go, but he sent one of his associates, Mordecai Ham, to preach at another evangelistic meeting. At that second revival in Charlotte a young teenager gave his life to Christ. His name was Billy Graham.

Edward Kimball didn’t do anything spectacular or out of the ordinary. He probably had moments in which he wondered if the time he spent teaching these teen-age boys and visiting them made any difference. Yet the time that Edward Kimball spent had a huge impact on the world and enabled millions of people to hear about Jesus.

For whatever reason, you are here today. Many of you are members of this church and come every week. Others heard that we are having free dessert and thought you’d check it out. Some of you are visitors and are trying to figure out if this is a place where you can worship God and a place that you can belong. Some of you are at home, watching on TV. For whatever reason, you have chosen to spend some of your time this morning in worship with us.

The reason you are here doesn’t really matter. God has brought you here for such a time as this. This church has a lot going on, lots of opportunities and needs. You’ll hear more about those over the next few weeks. If this church is going to become the place we want it to be, the place that God wants it to be, everyone needs to give some time to the ministry of this church, not only coming to worship when it’s convenient, but participating in the ministry to build the church and bring glory to God.

God has given you the gift of time. How you use that time, how you spend your time, is a reflection of your faith. You are here, as part of this church, for such a time as this.