

Sermon for 27 June 2021 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Scriptures: 2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27; Psalm 130 *De Profundis* (Page 848) ; 2 Corinthians 8 :7-15 ; Mark 5 :21- 43

« **About time...** »

There come times when the scriptures say too much. We've all watched preachers fumble and stumble then. I'm just reading a book about an Army Ranger --- the elite branch of Army recruits ... who surrenders his credentials and is eventually let go without a court martial in a fluke of mercy by the authorities. To come to terms with the whole experience, he walks across the country from East Coast to West Coast, raising funds for the Pat Tillman Foundation ... remember the football star who also became disillusioned with U.S. war policy and was killed by friendly fire in Afghanistan? At one point, a chaplain was assigned to work on my Ranger walker, and came at him hard with love of country and acceptance of authority, and it was all just words, empty words, to him.

Sometimes there's no way we can get free of a conviction that what we're involved in is wrong, too confused and mixed in motive to give our allegiance to. That's what today's scriptures confront me with on first glance. David grieves over Saul even though Saul had tried to kill David. David is now headed for the throne and it looks like he's elevating the kingship for his own purposes. It sounds like the news... What do you believe?

Then the psalm, the *De Profundis*, gives us all kinds of double messages about death, and being in trouble, and still hoping ... which is how defeat and disappointment and dying and losing a loved one feel, whether we're close to God or totally unacquainted... and yet if we survive, somehow we finally get up and march on ... which is the hidden point in all these texts, as well as all the scriptures...

Then Paul, raising funds for poor Jewish Christians, makes a big point about the work of generosity in the life of Christians ... again, turning need into blessing, if we really take the life and death of Jesus seriously..

And then the Gospel ... Two hopeless situations that, confronted with Jesus, become examples of life in the midst of death, healing emerging out of the last flickering of hope, that stand for everything we believe as Jesus people.

What we end up with, as we always do surrounded by the Word and the words of loving our friends in Christ keep bringing up, is a word I put before us in my sermon title. "About time..." "It's about time" you acted like God loves you..." Heavy emphasis on what we CAN do, what we OUGHT to be doing, no matter how we feel or what obstacles we face. And, at the same time, "About time Let me tell you about time ... it's as full of twists and turns, of love and not-love, as you can imagine, and believing right and doing right are as mixed up and undecided as anything else in this amazing thing called being that we're all a part of.... " Time goes by, and I learn to do brave things, beautiful things, un-impatient things, little by little and sometimes in big jumps that astound me. Twelve years the woman was ill ...and in the Jewish view, she was

unclean the whole time ... yet on this occasion, she reached out in hope, and the unbelievable happened ... she was healed ... she confessed, she didn't deny, and Jesus recognized her depth of trust overcoming her depth of despair And his closest disciples didn't even grasp the difference between the shove of the crowd and the touch of a trusting soul ... How long does it take, sisters and brothers, for us in Jesus' inner circle to see the work that is going on all the time simply because we walk with him and learn, over and over, little and lots, the goodness of life and the purpose of love? How long do we have to wait to learn yet again that real goodness isn't a matter of law, or money, or numbers, but something the Quakers express without any sermons whatsoever; what we are beginning to see can be overcome between black and white, and gay and straight, and convict and innocent, over and over ... We have more people in jail than any other country in the world, and call ourselves Christians! What an invitation that is to improvement as a nation, want a chance it is to a congregation to find fresh purpose and connection ...

Time is full of mixed messages. The one message we devote ourselves to, just by being here, and certainly by responding as this bumbling old pastor puts it, and our broken denomination keeps saying without being consistent or anything but an echo of the One we call brother and friend as well as Master and Lord ... this message of goodness, of the beauty of all things and the new life hidden in every dark shadow that looms ... Surely it's about time to do something for and with God, time to see and do beautiful things now that we know more than we did last year, or our ancestors did ... time that is in God's hands, never ending, always inviting, "Come and help me heal the sick, stand up for the sinner, show the foolish one a better way, with me and all who know the power of love, through all things, amen and amen."

About time. It's all about time.

With Jesus, I mean.

Thanks be to God.