

Hamilton Union 08/15/10

WHAT TIME IS IT?

O.T. Lesson: Isaiah 5:1-7

N.T. Lesson: Luke 12:49-56

I think Jesus sounds just a little bit annoyed.

Or maybe a *lot* annoyed!

He wishes it were time to complete his baptism – in death.

In fact, his baptism – his purpose – was only completed
in his crucifixion.

Even his followers don't understand him.

But when he says he came not to bring peace but division
his words are disconcerting, to say the least,
for those of us who live to make peace.

Does Jesus *want* us to be in conflict?

But now, hear what comes next:

He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, “It is going to rain”; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, “There will be scorching heat”; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

What time *is* this?

Traditionally, talk of “signs of the times” in Scripture
has led interpreters to contemplate the *end-times*,
the Apocalypse.

But that's *not* what Jesus meant!

The times he meant were the *present times*.

What made Jesus angry wasn't that his followers
couldn't predict the future,

but that they didn't understand what he was about
nor did they understand how far all people had strayed
from God's intentions!

Remember what Isaiah said?

That the sweet, juicy grapes the vintner planted
turned out to be sour grapes?

That's just what frustrates Jesus:

the grapes have turned sour, the people have gone astray,

and when God sends the Son to set things right,
the people can't see who he is!

What Jesus wants his followers to do
is to *see clearly* the ***present time!***

You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do
you not analyze this present time?

They spent all their time worrying, studying, calculating
when the *end-times* would come,
when all the time they ignored what was happening all around them!

What time is it?

Here is some of what I see in the present time:

It's time we stopped judging people on the color of their skin,
or the land of their birth,
or the creeds they espouse or reject,
or the clothes they wear or the political party they belong to;

It's time we stopped living our lives from fear,
insisting on our right to blow someone's brains out
before he has a chance to do the same to us;

It's time we stopped blaming others for our sins;

It's time we stopped yelling at each other and learned to listen;

It's time we realized that sometimes life hurts,
and we don't have to medicate against everything;

It's time we realized that everybody doesn't have to be like *us*;

It's time paid more attention to the person in front of us
than the one we might meet tomorrow.

Analyze this present time!

One commentator puts it this way:

Who did I drive by *this* morning? Who was I too busy for *today* that needed a
word of encouragement? What person cries out *right now* in a jail that is less than
a few minutes from my house, work, or church? This Jesus is angry. He is red-
in-the-face and stating, "Forget about the '*end times*.' forget about *someday*, quit
yakking about my return: "Analyze *this* present time!"

I don't know about you, but I seem to spend an inordinate amount of time
concerned about, worrying, thinking about

things that won't matter a hill of beans two years from now,
and too often neglecting things that are of lasting –
maybe even eternal – significance!

Culpepper, in his commentary on Luke in the *New Interpreter's Bible*, asks

Have we given as much attention to the health of the church as we have to our golf score?
Have we given as much attention to the maintenance of our spiritual disciplines as to the

maintenance schedule for our car? Where in the scale of our attention to detail does our devotion to the teachings of our Lord rank?

Or, as Mary Pipher, psychologist and cultural anthropologist says
in her book *The Shelter of Each Other: Rebuilding our Families*,
We have cared more about selling things to our neighbors than we've cared for our neighbors. The deck is stacked all wrong and ultimately we will all lose.
In my observation, this proves true not only of us as individuals,
but of us as a nation, and – dare I say it? – as a church
(capital “C” Church, denomination and whole universal church).

Jesus forgave people all sorts of sins.
But the one thing he couldn't tolerate was injustice,
and its companion found in too many religious people, hypocrisy.
Isaiah tells us that God expects justice,
but finds violence,
and God expects righteousness,
but hears the cries of victims.

Jesus looks at people, even his followers,
and sees more concern about getting ahead,
getting ones “just desserts”
than in lending a helping hand to others.

He looks at us, perhaps, and sees that we just *don't get it* –
that what he came to teach us
is that the whole purpose of our lives here
is to learn to love God,
and we can't possibly love God
if we don't love our neighbors.

And if we belong to a group – a congregation, a denomination, a nation –
that does not love its neighbors,
it is up to us to teach them to love, too.

And loving is *not* a feeling, but *actions* toward each other.
It means paying attention to the other's needs;
it means listening to the other;
it means respecting our sisters
and aiding our brothers,
it means listening to our brothers,
and taking the time to talk with our sisters.

That's what time it is.
It's time to *love*.

To God be the glory, forever and ever. Amen.