

## Time

Luke 12:49-56

Cradock Presbyterian Church

August 18, 2013

I'll be brief this morning. That way I won't waste much – time.

Time. We use the word all the time; but what does it mean? We all say to others, or to ourselves, a few times a day: "What time is it?" That question is so common, one of the great bands of the 60's, Chicago, wrote a hit song with the title, "Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?" That's time as in date time, clock time. It's how we organize our lives, around this kind of time. We make our schedules by it; we live by it. Your activities for the day are always in touch with this kind of time. The New Testament always uses the Greek word *κρονος* for this kind of time; we get our words like "chronological" and "chronometer" from it.

Then there's time as a measurement. I'm thinking of it as the time we talk about when we're thinking about a span of time, how long something takes or how long we need to wait. Anybody stuck at one of the tunnels around here knows this kind of time! You're sitting there fuming, wondering how long it will be (how much time it will take) before whatever the problem is gets resolved, and you get moving again. I'm glad I don't depend on the Downtown Tunnel these days! What a waste of – time.

There's still another way we think about time. At least part of the time! We think about it as an era, or an age, or something like "in that time," which Biblically also gets expressed as "in those days." This is so common in the Bible that sometimes no word in the Greek actually appears. It's just understood from the construction of the sentence.

And finally, the New Testament thinks in terms of *appointed time*. The Greek word for that is *καιρος*. This is time that is the fulfillment of something. It's sometimes talked about as "the right time." What it means is that something long-awaited has finally arrived.

This passage forces us to come to terms with the meaning of "time," what it means for us.

First, though, we have to deal with Jesus, and he's saying some things that are hard to hear at any time. He says he has come to bring fire to the earth, and he wishes it was already burning. The next verse completes the thought: Jesus has a "baptism with which to be baptized," and he is anxious to have it done. It's interesting to me; the word in the original that NRSV translates with the phrase "what stress I am under" literally means something like "constrained," "forcibly held back," "pressed down," or "pushed back." What the heck is all this about? I think it means that Jesus feels the pressure that he can't wait to get to the "appointed time," namely, his own death and resurrection. It is, for him, the something long-awaited. And not just for him!

See, Jesus knew that his death and resurrection, his call to abandon the Law of the fathers and come home to God, was going to divide his culture, his nation, like nothing ever had. I suspect he knew that as he was speaking, he was talking to people who didn't understand him. That's why he got into the things about the clouds rising and rain, and about the south wind and heat. It isn't about the weather! – it's about the self-assured, passed-down knowledge that these folks all take pride in. And yet! – they have completely missed Jesus' message to them. "Why do you not know how to interpret the

present *time*?" he asks. The word for time here is, indeed, *καιρος*. He's asking them why they can't recognize that in him, the appointed, completed time, the beginning of a new era or age, the new thing around which they'll organize their lives, has finally arrived. They should have recognized it. They had the prophets and their prophecies. Many of those to whom Jesus was speaking that day would try really hard to hold onto the old time, the time that had now passed. They'd be totally out of touch with this new time in which God wanted them to live. Not too much time would pass before they'd be out there screaming, "Give us Barabbas! Crucify him!" They thought Jesus' "time" was over. Little did they know.

But do we know? You and I need to be careful. We could very well follow in the footsteps of those listening to Jesus that day, who refused to put themselves under this new time, this new era, that began with Jesus' death and resurrection. They refused because they were comfortable living in their current, this-worldly time. What do you and I organize our lives around? To the hands of the clock, or to the outstretched hands of our savior? Do we live by the rules of *his* new time, *his* new age, the rules that say, "Love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength?" – or do we live out-of-touch with his "time."? Do we measure our lives by God's time, or by the time of this world?

Well, we live in a much different situation than the people of the Bible did. The "appointed time," the "fulness of time," has already happened. We know that. What was long-awaited we don't have to wait for – it's our present reality. The new era, the new age, has begun. It's the era of God's *love*, not his judgment. It's the era of a living Holy

Spirit that guides and informs us, so that we are *never* alone. It's the era right before the end of all eras – the time when God fulfills all things, and brings us all to his side in heaven.

But are we like those people in the story, who can decipher the things of today with great ease, but can't see God in their very midst? I pray that that's not us! Because in the end, *we* might just run out of time. Time is something we take for granted. It's not eternal. It's a thing of this world; and when this world passes away, it ceases to be. Therefore, *it's not important in the scheme of eternal things.*

Except for this: the only time that counts is *today, right now*. That's because it is the time we've been given. It's time in which we do our work for God, our way of showing thanks for the eternity he's given us. You've heard the phrase, "there's no time like the present," haven't you? Now is the time when you and I need to rededicate ourselves to God. That's something each of us needs to do every single day. God is *still* in our very midst, calling us to his service in the world. Will we make the time to serve?