

It's Time!

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on March 21st. 2021 – John 12: 20-33)

In the last few weeks, we have seen a number of things that have sent us a message about time, about time being up.

1. Autumn – the leaves are changing colour, leaves are falling, we have had a few beautiful days, the days are getting shorter, all in preparation for winter. All preparing themselves so that in Spring they will come back to life and fill our streets and lives with flowers, blossom. Our bible reading from John speaks of a grain of wheat that must fall and die in order to produce more grain. We see this in autumn all around us. It's time, time for the season to change and prepare for new birth.
2. Women's March 4 Justice on March 14th – women gathered across the nation calling for a stop to violence against them, to stop sexual harassment, to ask for equality and to speak to our elected politicians -some of whom joined them. Ironically, they were offered behind closed doors a meeting with the Prime Minister and Minister for Women - precisely the thing they were protesting about – the secrecy with which these matters are dealt with. It's time, they are saying, for this to stop.
3. Black Lives Matter Movement – throughout last year we saw throughout the world, marches seeking an end to racism. It's time, for justice and equality, they implore.
4. Close the Gap Day – which was during the week, a day to celebrate achievements made in helping indigenous people have the same opportunities as the rest of us. Sadly we haven't made much progress – the health of indigenous people is still so much poorer, incarceration rates are so much higher and deaths in custody are worse than ever, just in the last week 3 indigenous people died in custody. It is time, they say.
5. Climate Change – the young people have been leading the way in regard to our climate and stopping us from continuing to destroy the planet. It's time, they say.

Jeremiah in our first reading says the time has come for the new covenant, where God's law will be written on the hearts of people and forgiveness will abound. It's time!

Jesus has some Greeks looking for him, they want to see him. When they do, he gives them a long lesson about time as well. The reading we have today forms the centrepiece of John's gospel; everything is about to change. Up until now we have had stories from Jesus public ministry, from now on we will get his private ministry with the disciples. We have seen Jesus do amazing things – turn water into wine, feed 5000, heal people and raise Lazarus. Jesus has had interesting encounters with Nicodemus under the cover of night, with the woman at the well at noon, with a woman caught in adultery and with the man born blind. He has described himself as living water, the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd and the resurrection and the life. The religious authorities have started to hatch a plot to arrest and kill him. No wonder the Greeks want to see him! When they see him, Jesus wants to make sure they see the whole picture! So, he tells them in a couple of ways.

First, he tells them the Son of Man is about to be glorified – one can only imagine what they were expecting. He says ‘the hour’ has come. It’s time! The ‘hour’ in John’s gospel, is about God’s glory being revealed and for John that means the crucifixion. So, Jesus here talks about his crucifixion, death and resurrection. Glory is about vulnerability, glory is about love, glory is about new beginnings.

He then tells them a little parable of what that glory will be like. Probably the shortest parable in the bible. Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains but a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit. A story from nature to illustrate his point. A proverb that was observable and true in the natural world – seeds must fall and die in order for new plants to grow and bear fruit, flowers or whatever.

Jesus then goes on to tell them about serving and following. Being a disciple means that you will follow Jesus and find yourselves in the same place as he does – that is, following will get you into trouble, it will get you into some interesting encounters with people and others will want to get rid of you.

For us it too is time.

A time to figure out what needs to die so that new birth can arise – a time to let go of fear, of anger, of resentment, of ego, of regret, of disappointment, of guilt, or of the need for other people’s approval or anything that holds us back from living life to the full. A time to live a life that knows God’s love, time to live life that is freeing and enables us to be all God wants us to be.

A time to follow. A time to follow Jesus who reverses the order of the world, who is willing to put himself on the line for others, who is able to be humble and vulnerable, who stands up against the powerful.

A time for forgiveness and peace – after all that is the crux of our faith.

A time to bear fruit – abundant fruit, abundant life. A time to nurture that within ourselves and each other that will bear the fruit of the spirit – generosity, kindness, gentleness, love.

As we make our way toward Easter we will walk with Jesus – walk with him through the crowds who adore him and also those who want his head, walk with him as he eats with his friends, washes their feet, prays in the Garden, is betrayed and denied, suffers the most despicable death and rises again.

It’s time, time to remind ourselves that God’s glory is about vulnerability, is about love. Amen.