

## THE TIME IS NOW!



### *Scripture:*

### **Psalm 77:11-20**

<sup>11</sup>I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD; I will remember your wonders of old. <sup>12</sup>I will meditate on all your work, and muse on your mighty deeds. <sup>13</sup>Your way, O God, is holy. What god is so great as our God? <sup>14</sup>You are the God who works wonders; you have displayed your might among the peoples. <sup>15</sup>With your strong arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah*

<sup>16</sup>When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; the very deep trembled. <sup>17</sup>The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered; your arrows flashed on every side. <sup>18</sup>The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook. <sup>19</sup>Your way was through the sea, your path, through the mighty waters; yet your footprints were unseen. <sup>20</sup>You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

### **Luke 9:51-62**

(A lot has already happened in this chapter before we get to this part of Chapter 9. Jesus has sent out the twelve disciples to villages to spread the good news of God's love and to heal people on his behalf, he has prayed with them when they returned, they have fed five-thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish, he went up the mountain with three of his disciples and was transfigured, then he healed a boy who had a seizure disorder, and he solved an argument about who was going to be the greatest in heaven by reminding them that the least among them was the greatest. Now it reads:

<sup>51</sup>When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup>And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; <sup>53</sup>but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup>When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" <sup>55</sup>But he turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup>Then they went on to another village.

<sup>57</sup>As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." <sup>58</sup>And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." <sup>59</sup>To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." <sup>60</sup>But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." <sup>61</sup>Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." <sup>62</sup>Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



## THE TIME IS NOW

Here's a question that seems to stand out from this passage: "If you could command fire to come down from heaven would you do it?" After the fires we experienced this "commanding fire to come down from heaven" has a whole new personal meaning for us now, doesn't it? We take any talk about fire consuming people very seriously now. It's no joke.

### JESUS REBUKED HIS DISCIPLES

And isn't it strange that the disciples, James and John would even consider commanding fire to consume people? Haven't they learned anything from the 'Love Your Enemies' and 'Love your Neighbor' commands that Jesus gave them long before this?

But this impulsive question to Jesus gives us a clue to the cultural context of this passage. In the era when Jesus walked this earth, the Samaritans were viewed as the scum of the earth by the Jews.

So, I'm glad Jesus rebuked his disciples for even thinking of bringing fire down upon them. I wonder how he rebuked them. It doesn't say. So, I imagine it was something like a mother would say. "Never talk about your brothers and your sisters like that again, or you will be consumed by fire!"

Then Jesus seems to just shake off being upset and they move onward. But he is weary. While complaining that he has nowhere to lay his head, Jesus runs into yet another person who promises to faithfully follow him, and he doubts this enthusiast is sincere. Since he was about to be arrested and betrayed by Judas, he must have felt very, very tired of people being false to him and misunderstanding his mission on earth.

### FOLLOW WITHOUT HESITATION

To this one he encourages him to follow without hesitation. I know Jesus sounds quite cruel here, but there is no evidence to show that the man's father is dead even though the professed follower says he needs to bury his Dad first before following Jesus. It could be that the man is asking to first bury his father because his father would not approve of him following Jesus. He wants to wait until his father dies before he joins The Way of Jesus.

I have heard others say this in modern times. They have Catholic or Jewish parents and have said, "I can't join the Presbyterian Church until my

Catholic or Jewish parent passes away. They would be so upset with me."

### A METAPHOR

Also, Jesus may be possibly using a metaphor here for what it means to be "dead." When he says, "Let the dead bury the dead," he may be comparing their being "dead" to his followers being what we think of as "alive in Christ." Those who have not accepted the living water of Jesus may be thought of as "spiritually dead." People who do not trust in his unconditional love miss out on living a truly peaceful life.

**Jesus was promoting commitment to and faith in his Good News of God's love to empower them to faithfully proclaim the kingdom of God. He didn't want "wishy washy" followers. He wanted the real authentic believers who could withstand the pressures and persecutions they might suffer in the future.**

Ever feel wishy washy in your faith in God? Or do you confidently spread the Good News of God's love in your actions all the time?

### LUKEWARM CHRISTIANITY

I listened to a lot of sermons before I went to seminary, and one sermon really stands out in my memory. It was preached by Dr. Peggy Cantwell at National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. She talked about lukewarm Christianity and how she said she would rather meet an atheist who was confident in his belief system than meet a person who professed to be a Christian but was just lukewarm about their faith. I was kind of shocked.

It took tons of faith and courage to be followers of Jesus in the days of the early church. Today we are living legacies of those brave souls who survived persecution to spread the ways of Jesus. They had to face rejection from their own families, rejection from friends, and often rejection and even imprisonment by the government authorities because the new Christian faith was perceived as a threat to their government's control over the people.

The new band of Christians were obedient to a higher power than Caesar and they followed the commands of Jesus to love God and neighbor over

and above the laws of the Jewish culture and often against the laws of the Roman governed nation where they were citizens.

This week coming up we celebrate the independence won for our freedom in this great country. It is a worthy cause to celebrate. However, some of the ways our country was formed took away the freedom of those who were native to this land and had a claim on it first.

### ***INSPIRED***

Rachel Held Evans was a young Mom, wife, and theologian who died suddenly last year leaving a husband and two young children behind. She wrote numerous books exploring her roller coaster faith journey. Her book: *Inspired*, tells the story of an army of English settlers under the leadership of Captain John Mason who breached the walls of a Pequot village near the Mystic River, (where the Coast Guard Academy now sits). In 1637 the English settlers burned alive hundreds of Pequot people under the guise of Christianity. One of the leaders, John Underhill, wrote about the massacre: “Should not Christians have more mercy and compassion? Sometimes the scripture declareth that women, and children must perish. We had sufficient light from the word of God for our proceedings that day...”

For Underhill and other European colonialists, The Bible’s Old Testament war stories gave them an excuse to dominate the native peoples. If you read the Old Testament historically based war stories our Bible seems to defend genocide, too.

### **THREE TYPES OF RESPONSES**

There are three types of responses that people might have to these stories

- 1) They accept without question that God ordered a military campaign to wipe out opponents of Israel.
- 2) There are those who are so troubled by the notion of God condoning ethnic cleansing that it strains their faith or compels them to abandon it all together.
- 3) Those who can name all the Kardashians (but not the books of the Bible) probably don’t think that deeply about either response, one or two.

Rachel Held Evans, put herself in category number two. She considered abandoning her faith, when the Bible was used to justify the massacre of native Americans. (The congregation watched a short clip of Rachel as she is interviewed about one of her other books she wrote on evolution and Christian faith.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8XPri6mILU>

## **QUESTIONING THE BRUTALITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Rachel was always a deep thinker. She questioned the brutality of the Old Testament stories beginning as a child in Sunday School. When she heard the story of Noah’s ark, she asked her teacher if God “was the good guy or the bad guy in the story since he drowned everyone except two of each animal?”

As an adult she consulted various theologians and scientists to work through her doubts. Evans concluded that: If we train ourselves to not ask hard questions about the Bible, then where will we find the courage to challenge interpretations that justify injustices? How will we know when we’ve got the interpretation wrong?” (Like the so-called Southern Christians who rationalized having slaves because there is a Bible verse that says: “Slaves, obey your masters in everything!”)

**Rachel Evans was also a fan of Thomas Paine who wrote an essay called *Common Sense*. Paine paved the way for the American Revolution and our Declaration of Independence. He said, “Belief in a cruel God makes a cruel man.”**

When Rachel Evans researched the Old Testament war stories to find out why they were so cruel compared to the New Testament stories of Christ’s love and acceptance of people like the Samaritans, Evans found that many of the Bible’s war stories were written down hundreds of years after the real events happened. The stories had been passed down many decades by the oral tradition of storytelling to shape and form a nation’s understanding of their historical relationship with God.

The authors wrote the Old Testament with an agenda to inspire a specific group of people living in a particular religious, social, and political context at that time. That doesn’t mean there is not much to learn from reading those stories.

But the advent of Jesus turned the war stories on their heads. Many of the Old Testament war stories had a wealthy royal king as the main character, yet

Jesus was born to a humble family among oppressed people in occupied territory.

Instead of rallying his troops for battle he washed his disciples' feet the night before he was arrested.

### ***A CALL TO UNCOMMON COURAGE***

I am a fan of both Rachel Held Evans and Sister Joan Chisitter, a Benedictine nun. Sister Joan also wrote numerous books, but the latest is titled: *The Time is Now: A Call to Uncommon Courage*.

Sister Joan starts out the book by saying: "This book is about the prophet in you. You have a choice to be a church goer or a prophet." She believes we are all called to be prophets and encourages us to speak out in this "world where rugged individualism reigns and those who can't make it on their own are easily forgotten."

She says that now is the time we must do more than simply serve them. We must lead this world beyond its present divisions of race and gender, of national identity and economic class. The prophets of today must be on a path toward the Kingdom rather than the path to a gold palace.

Chisitter says the world needs us all to take our place beside Jesus where no one's needs and no one's pain is overlooked along the way.

### **OPPOSITION FROM PULPITS**

Across the span of history, the fiercest of nonviolent opposition to government oppression came from pulpits. Reverend Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and Reverend Desmond Tutu are great examples. But when the Benedictine sisters protested the nuclear arms race and the Vietnam War they were called "Feminazis," but that mockery did not deter them.

Sister Joan says: Prophecy is a "powerful presence" and essential to the continuing development of the church and of our nation, peoples, and planet. She suggests that to live prophetically we must compare the lives we live with our commitment to the liberty and justice for all in our pledge of allegiance.

Chisitter believes: Our commitment to helping carry the burdens of others, while eradicating sexism, slavery, and elitism, will awaken people to hope and help recreate the world again. The kingdom of God will be real when the last of the hungry have been fed and when the poor are healthy, and all housed in decent homes. Then their babies will have a future to live for.

**Leonardo Da Vinci said,  
"Nothing strengthens (oppressive)  
authority so much as silence."**

The call from God is not to be wishy washy but to have a clear, strong voice that challenges oppression and discrimination in all its forms, to use our personal and national resources to wage war against our home-grown threats to life, liberty, health and safety for all.

### **CALL OUT INJUSTICE**

We are not called to wage war against another poor country full of deeply oppressed people. The time is now for every prophet here (all of you) to call out injustice of every kind and promote the fullness of life for every person on the planet. (Global connection and dependency are real. We all need each other to survive and we all need to intervene to prevent conflicts and violence before neighborhood and global wars begin.)

A prophet can't be wishy washy or lukewarm in their faith. To promote the gospel message, you must be certain of God's love for you and for all of creation. So, trust. Then be a prophet who keeps your eye on the plow in front of you. No turning back to a wishy-washy lukewarm faith. Keep your eye on the kingdom and do all you can to help bring it to earth as it is in heaven. Our time to make a difference is NOW!

### **Benediction:**

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore. Amen**



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