

**New Testament Lesson—Acts 1:6-14**

*So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.*

**New Testament Lesson—John 17:1-11**

*After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.*

It's time to preach. The moment has arrived to take the words of Scripture, as we encounter them, into our hearts.

The hour has come for the Church to listen for the will of God and to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit. Yes, the hour has come, my friends.

We've arrived at today's sermon. Siblings in Christ, the hour has come. The time is now. Right here...right now.

But you already knew that, I suppose. Anyone with a bulletin or a very basic knowledge of Presbyterian worship can understand how the preaching moment fits in to our order of service.

We're accustomed to how things go—experienced enough to anticipate what's coming—even if you happened to arrive fifteen or twenty minutes late to worship.

But, things are much less predictable out there—out there in the world—outside the familiar walls of Cedar Heights church. From where I'm standing, it feels like we're living with more uncertainties than ever before. At least, that's how I feel. And I wager I'm not alone.

In fact, I know I'm not alone because I've talked about it with many of you. It feels like we can't anticipate what's coming in the same way we once could. And so, we grapple with a kind of societal anxiety that seems to hang over us and those we love.

And this anxiety isn't uniform. In other words, it's not experienced in the same way for you and I and our neighbors.

For so many, the pace of change has overwhelmed us. Progress is and has been moving at the speed of light. Both socially and technologically, many of us just don't recognize this world anymore. It's no longer intuitive to navigate. So much doesn't make sense and we long—we yearn—we are desperate for when we used to understand the culture around us.

“Why do our picture frames need to be computerized?” one might ask.

On the other hand, for many of us, the pace of change seems painfully slow, if not rewinding before our eyes. Social progress feels stunted—stagnate—even elusive—as if it might all slip away if we were to take even a moment's breath to rest and care for ourselves. And for these folks, many just don't recognize this world anymore; and the work to be done has overwhelmed us. It's all just too much.

And for both groups, perhaps: it's like we can't anticipate what's coming in the same way as before—even just a few years ago. We don't know what to expect. God only knows what tomorrow will bring. Only God knows.

I think, for what it's worth, that our own context in 2026 helps us to empathize with Jesus' friends and disciples. In both readings from John's gospel and from Acts, Jesus' inner circle is wrestling with what their lives might be like without their Teacher by their side.

What will things be like for them and for the world once Jesus has gone on to be with God? What's going to happen once he's ascended to the Father? How on earth are they to keep going? After all, they can't anticipate what's coming in the same way as before. They're entering uncharted territory. They won't know what to expect.

Things are changing. Greater changes are coming. Changes bring uncertainty and anxiety. Change is hard. Change is good. The hour has come.

At the beginning of the book of Acts, it's clear Jesus' disciples are operating from a place of fear, of dread, and impatience. They don't yet see the world and God's people in way Jesus has taught them to see it.

Just before his Ascension to heaven, Jesus' friends ask him: *"Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

In other words, they ask, “Has the hour finally come when you're going to stick it to Rome, bring the Emperor to his knees, and put our people on the throne?”

You see: They still see everything in binary terms. They see a divided society, entrenched in an “us versus them” worldview. You might even say Jesus' companions are asking the partisan question: “Lord, are you finally going to remove them from power? Isn't it time for King David's people to take this nation back?”

Now, I don't want to be too harsh on the disciples here. We shouldn't judge too much. After all, I can't really blame them for craving an end to imperial rule. I won't blame them for wanting and hoping and praying for Jesus to help—to intervene—to *do* something.

Yes, the hour has come, Jesus says—but not to fight fire with fire—not to exchange violence for violence—cruelty for cruelty—insult for insult—not to use the tools of the oppressors against them.

As much as we might be tempted, we mustn't ever use our plowshares and pruning hooks as weapons to attack "them"—to strike those on the other side.

Remember: God didn't "so love" *your* group, *your* side, *your* people. God didn't even "so love" the Church. God so loved *the world*.

No, the hour has come for an entirely different approach to what ails our nation and our world. The moment has arrived to dismantle the worldview of "us versus them." It is way past time to push ourselves to a kind of empathy we never thought possible.

Siblings in Christ, the hour has come to notice the image of God in every person, every human being, every neighbor—full stop, no excuses.

The indisputable fact that everyone is a beloved child of God, a child created with purpose and potential, must be our primary lens, our compass, and our guiding light.

Jesus is plainspoken about this. In John's gospel, Jesus is praying for his disciples then and now. The hour has come. God will be glorified by Christ's resurrection and ascension. And once Christ has ascended, those who love God and follow Jesus will need to come together.

The time will come, Jesus says, when coming together will no longer be a luxury, but a necessity.

This is Jesus' prayer for us. It's God's will for us...

*And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one...so that they may be one, as we are one.*

The hour has come, my friends, to strive for the unity Jesus prays for. It's time to believe that true unity is possible, even in this day and age—especially in this day and age—for such a time as this.

Because it's only through such togetherness—only through understanding our humanity as rooted in God's love and sustained by God's grace—that we begin to let go of the uncertainties and anxieties that keep us frozen in a cesspool of cynicism and apathy.

No more of these self-righteous aphorisms and watchwords. No more high-horses that threaten dialogue before a single word is spoken. Be done with the name-calling. Away with the villainizing that ultimately comes from viewing the world as "us versus them."

For God's sake...Can we all agree to get off the high horse? Followers of Christ are much better suited for a donkey, anyway...

Now I know that for some, the worldview Christ asks us to embody might seem naïve. Yet, here's the thing: we can no longer afford to mistake hopefulness for naivete. They are not the same. It is a brave thing to hope. For where there's hope, faith and love tend to be nearby.

I know that for some, striving for our unity in Christ might feel toothless or ineffective, especially as we so deeply yearn for God's justice and peace. But friends, we've long known that "a tooth for a tooth" isn't sustainable. It does not work.

Let me be clear. Our oneness in Christ—the unity Jesus prays for—it doesn't come at the expense of what makes us individually special. Christ isn't praying that we cast aside our unique cultures and experiences. It's not a washing away of differences.

He's not praying that we stop recognizing what makes someone who they are. He's not praying that we all use the exact same practices for baptism or Communion. I assure you, Scripture is quite *loud* about how much God celebrates diversity.

No, our oneness in Christ means that, among all the identities we carry (parent, sibling, immigrant, banker, soldier, activist, and so on)—our unity in Christ means that “follower of Jesus” is our first and foremost. We are disciples first, before anything else.

It means that “follower of Jesus” is our primary way we understand who we are. It is the identity through which all the others are expressed. Being a “follower of Jesus,” for example, guides the way we parent and the way we use our resources.

And this one’s crucial, if not a bit hard to swallow: Our identity as disciples determines how we treat both the most vulnerable and the most heinous. There isn’t any part of us that isn’t first filtered through the example and teachings of Christ Jesus.

If we claim Jesus as our Lord, then all other hats we wear have to be secondary.

“*So that they may be one, as we are one.*” This is Christ’s prayer for us—that we respond to the uncertainties and anxieties of the world with unity—by knowing that Christ’s love for us acts as a bridge to every human heart—even those we might have labeled a ‘lost cause’—even those we believe to be heartless.

It’s simplicity—it’s false naiveté (I think)—it’s foolishness is what makes it so radical—so powerful—so very needed.

How marvelous! How extraordinary that *we*, the Church, the disciples of Jesus, have the opportunity to answer the prayers *of Christ!*

Amazing, right? With God’s help, *we* can be an answer to prayer. Maybe we already are...Maybe...

“We are one in the Spirit; we are one in the Lord; we are one in the Spirit; we are one in the Lord, and we pray that all unity may one day be restored; And they’ll know we are Christians by our love.”

Amen.