The Time Has Come

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The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ***2*** *As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way;* ***3*** *the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"* ***4*** *John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.* ***5*** *And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.* ***6*** *Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.* ***7*** *He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.* ***8*** *I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit*." (Mark 1:1-8).

1. Your Favorite Month

What is favorite month? December was an exciting time for me as a child because it signaled that a New Year was not far away. New Year's Day is a special day for children in Korea. There is delicious food and lots of gifts from parents. It is the time to visit grandparents, relatives, and neighbors to wish a happy new year.

Children bow to their elders and receive New Year's Day money. For Christians, Christmas is the time that we share the best gift of all, the gift of Christ. How would we like to share God's greatest gift with others this year?

2. John the Baptist

By tradition, the Israelites had been waiting for the Messiah for over 400 years before the birth of Jesus. Following the prophet Malachi, there was no prophet among the Israelites that proclaimed the words of the Lord. So they wondered whether God had forsaken them.

Mark's gospel begins by introducing us to John the Baptist. Mark's gospel doesn't tell us who John was, but we find in Luke's gospel that John was the son of Zechariah, a priest. And Elizabeth was his mother.

One day while on duty at the Temple, Zechariah was burning incense when an angel of the Lord appeared to him, telling him that he would have a son named John. Zechariah was happy and grateful. His Son, John the Baptist, would be God's gift to Zechariah and Elizabeth because both were too old to have a baby naturally.

The reason for God to give a son to Zechariah was that God had a plan for John. Luke 1:16 says, ***"He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God."*** John would help many people to turn to the Lord God and welcome the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Mark tells us that the birth of John the Baptist was prophesied in the Old Testament. Mark 1:2 says, "***As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way;*** [3] ***the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight***,'"

Although Mark identifies Isaiah as the one who prophesied the birth of John the Baptist, these statements are actually from three scriptures: Exodus, Malachi, and Isaiah. Exodus 23:2 says, "***I am going to send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.***"

Mark says that John the Baptist would lead the people to Christ Jesus just like an angel led the people out of Egypt.

Malachi 3:1 also talks about the coming of God's messenger. "***See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me."*** Mark interprets this verse from Malachi to identify John as the one who prepares the way for Christ.

Isaiah 40:3 says, "***A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.***" Isaiah prophesied this event during the Babylonian exile. The people were in despair, but Isaiah proclaims that God would lead the Israelites back through the wilderness to Jerusalem, just like God did when he led the Israelites to the Promised Land. In 530 BCE, this happened when the Jewish exiles were allowed to return to Jerusalem.

3. The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness

When John the Baptist preached, "***Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near***" (Matthew 3:2), many people came from Jerusalem, Judea and the region of Jordan to be baptized. Suddenly John became popular among the people and would be similar to one of our celebrities today.

But John tells the people to focus on the coming Messiah and not on him. John says, ***"The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.*** Although he is popular among the people, he stresses that he is nobody. John points to Jesus' overwhelming significance to his followers.

4. People are in the Wilderness

Our current situation can feel to many like living in a wilderness. There are a lot of things to be afraid of. People want to find a place where there is no isolation, sickness or death.

People are looking for hearing good news about safety, hope, peace, love, and joy. What do you think we Christians can offer them in times like this? What good news can we share with those who are suffering during this pandemic?

5. Baptism of the Holy Spirit

John the Baptist says, "***I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit***" (verse 8). What does it mean that Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit? Are we baptized with the Holy Spirit? How do we know that we are baptized with the Holy Spirit? And why is it important to be baptized with the Holy Spirit?

Jesus tells the disciples in Acts 1:8, "***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***."

The disciples were changed on the day of Pentecost when they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. Peter and the others changed drastically. They went from being afraid and lonely to having all their fears gone and witnessed to Jesus Christ with boldness.

From the disciples, we see that the sign of being baptized with the Holy Spirit can be found in our relationship with fear. If our hearts are filled with fear, we may not be baptized with the Holy Spirit. But if we are baptized with the Holy Spirit, we are able to face fear with confidence and boldness in the Lord. I believe that now is the time that we need to be filled with boldness from the Lord so that we can help others to be free from fear.

6 Conclusion

Today's sermon title is "The Time Has Come." The Bible has two concepts of time in Greek, ***Chronos*** and ***Kairos***. *Chronos* is the sequential movement of time like clocks and calendars. *Kairos* is the concept of the right season or occasion in time.

The arrival of John the Baptist and Jesus in the world is an example of God's Kairos timing, the right time and season according to God's plan. Today is December 6, 2020. It is a *chronos* time. However, from God's perspective, it could be a *kairos* time. God has a specific purpose for each of us during this time and season. What do you think the Lord wants of us today? I believe that God has placed us in New England to show the peace

of Christ to others, even as we live among the wilderness in the danger of the pandemic.

7. Application

Last week, we began the season of Advent and shared the 4 themes of the season: hope, peace, love and joy. This week's theme is peace. The hymn #377, "It is well with my soul" is a hymn that I would like to share with you this morning. I shared with you before the story behind the hymn. It is a story about peace in the midst of a crisis.

Horatio Spafford lost a fortune in the great Chicago Fire of 1871. His four-year-old son died of scarlet fever and his four daughters perished in a ship accident crossing the Atlantic Ocean. When Horatio's wife arrived in England, she sent a telegram to her husband, "Saved alone. What shall I do?"

Horatio immediately sailed for England. During his voyage, his ship passed the area of his daughters' accident. As Horatio thought of his daughters, words of comfort and peace filled his heart. He wrote them down. "***When peace like a river, attendeth my way. When sorrows like sea billows roll- Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to know. It is well, it is well with my soul***. **It is well, it is well with my soul."**

We know that not everything in life will go the way we plan. There will always be storms and tragedies in life. But we can say with assurance that "it is well with my soul," when we have faith in the Lord and put our trust in the loving God. Jesus, who baptizes us with the Holy Spirit, gives us this peace in the midst of fear and tragedy. Remember that many people are in need of this peace as well. What would God want us to do?

Isaiah 9:6 says, ***"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*** Dear sisters and brother, the time has come for us to share the peace of Jesus Christ, with those around us. Amen.