

The Present Tense

Rev. Joe Connolly

Moments ago you heard these words from Second Corinthians: “For God says, [and here Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah] / ‘At an acceptable time I heard you, / and on a day of salvation I helped you’ (unquote). / See, now is the acceptable time! See, now is the day of salvation!” — 2 Corinthians 6:2.

In this brief reading I think Paul says something amazing. First, God listens and hears. What? God listens... to us? And hears? How remarkable.

O.K. But what is this acceptable time to which God refers? I need to say two things about that. Paul quotes Second Isaiah, a passage probably written in the 6th Century Before the Common Era. The Israelites were in captivity in Babylon.

And, of course, this Apostle writes in the First Century of the Common Era, hundreds of years later. Despite the elapsed time since then, it’s clear we are meant to hear these words today—*today*—since these words are couched in the present tense. “*Now* is the acceptable time.”

What are we to make of that? (Slight pause.) This is how I understand it: we need to participate in the Dominion of God, right here, right now. (Slight pause.)

This service of worship has already and will, in many ways, reinforce that message. We invoked the blessing of God as we said goodbye to a member of the community.

Later we shall honor members in long standing. We will also bless and give thanks for one of our mission projects, this one with Opportunities for Chenango.

And yes, we shall have an organizational meeting. All of which informs us since, in these rituals, we recognize where we have been, where we are now and where we need to go. (Slight pause.)

In the July/August Newsletter of this church which will get mailed next Friday. In it I will be writing about what happened two weeks ago when the New York Conference of the United Church of Christ had its Annual Meeting. I will address something of great importance about where we have been, where we are now and where we need to go.

At the meeting we passed a resolution which declared us to be an anti-racism Conference. If you’re paying any attention to the news, one can readily argue we live in difficult times when it comes to ethical issues. And one could readily argue we humans always live in difficult times when it comes to ethical issues.

But that is the point I think Paul is making. Especially in times seen as difficult, *this* is the acceptable time. *Now* is the time for us to take a stand for God’s justice, God’s equity, God’s

peace, God's hope, God's freedom, God's love.

Now is the acceptable time for us to strive to live by ethical standards beyond reproach. So, where have *we* been unethical by breaking covenant? When we break covenant with anyone—*anyone*—that is unethical. So committing to anti-racism is but a small step on that ethical journey.

And now *is* the acceptable time for us to examine our own ethical standards. Now *is* the acceptable time for us to participate in the Dominion of God, the Realm of God, the acceptable time to embrace God's love in this, our broken world. Amen. [1]

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ENDPIECE: It is the practice of the Pastor to speak after the Closing Hymn, but before the Choral Response and Benediction. This is an précis of what was said: “Earlier I said the New York Conference of the United Church of Christ passed an anti-racism resolution. We were moved to consider it because of an incident of racism on the campus at Syracuse University and the Conference Meeting was just miles away from the campus. On the other hand, it is telling that in today's world we even had to consider such a resolution. Indeed, both the headlines in the news and that such a resolution was on our docket informs us about how broken, how lacking in ethical standards our world is. I need to add that didn't happen yesterday. That's not new. It also informs us about the work we need to do to help this broken world participate in the Dominion of God, the Realm of God. It is my hope that here today, in this service of worship at least ritually, we addressed some of that. It is my hope that those rituals empower us to move out from these walls and into world where the Gospel is in sore need of being preached.”

BENEDICTION: May we love God so much, that we love nothing else too much. May we be so in awe of God, that we are in awe of no one else and nothing else. Amen.

[1] Note: because of all the extra rituals in this service of worship, i.e.: an Annual Meeting, a Ceremony of שלום (*Shalom*), Certificates to Members in Long Standing Ceremony and a culmination of the Deacons' OFC Mission Project Presentation, this is a relatively short homily.