

Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from January 17, 2010

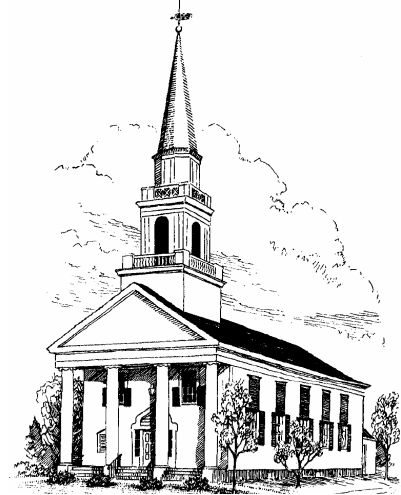
Rev. Ann M. Aaberg

“No Time Like the Present”

Scriptures:

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

John 2:1-11



There's a commercial running on TV right now for a sinus medicine that grants instant relief. The husband is sitting reading a magazine in the easy chair and comes across an ad for the sinus product and shouts out to his wife in the kitchen, “Hey, honey!” and attempts to tell her about this new amazing product that will clear her sinuses instantly. Meanwhile we see her in the kitchen opening the same product and every time he shouts, “Hey, honey!” she responds with “In a minute!” “Hey, honey!” “In a *minute!*” Then the voice-over tells us viewers about this great sinus medicine which will clear nasal passages in a minute, and the commercial closes with his wife now breathing freely, entering the living room, discovering her husband in the easy chair with the magazine and says, “Honey, when are you going to fix that door?” He responds sheepishly, “In a minute?”

I am struck by the commercial every time I see it, not because of the annoying stereotypical spousal exchange, but because, admittedly, it resonates with me personally. I was told more than once during my adolescence that my middle name should have been “in a minute.” I've always been plagued by procrastination and I'm wondering about the rest of us. By a show of hands, who has a task right now of any kind (on your desk, in your closet, anywhere), which you've been putting off? How about a personal decision?

We all have our reasons for procrastinating. The task itself may be boring or distasteful. We may have no idea how long it will take once we get into it. Maybe we don't know if we can even do it until we try it. If it's a decision, the pros and cons may be quite even. Or we may have a pretty good idea of what the results will probably be and we'd rather put off those results. Like taking the new job or quitting the old job. Or saying yes to the repeated lunch invitation from the talkative neighbor. We have many reasons for procrastinating, and if they are not really legitimate, we're still very good at rationalizing them.

Interpreters of the words in the Bible are always warned: be very careful when you start to speculate what may have been in the mind of Christ. Dangerous territory. Not only can some forms of speculation be irresponsible, but we humans cannot possibly know the mind of God, and our daring to do so could be viewed as pretty darn arrogant. So, when Jesus responds to his mother's statement “They have no wine” at the wedding in Cana and says, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come,” we are left to wonder why, seemingly in the next moment, he turns some 150 gallons of water into wine. One commenta-

tor simply terms it as “one of the unexplained mysteries in this text.”

This text, the story of Jesus’ first miracle at the wedding in Cana, appears only in the gospel of John. And the result of this, the first of his signs, is the revelation of his glory to the servants who were there and to his disciples. But why the initial hesitation?

Carol Lakey Hess, Associate Professor of Religious Education at Candler School of Theology, informs us of the term “the scandal of divine reluctance.” The scandal of divine reluctance. There’s a little different connotation to the word *scandal* than what we’re used to—this *scandal* is from the Latin word meaning “stumbling block”. The stumbling block of divine reluctance. Just as the mother of Jesus (who by the way is never named in the gospel of John) gives him a little prod to respond to the need of the wedding hosts and guests, some theologians posit that God may need our prodding.

When Martin Luther King, Jr. Weekend comes around each year, I never tire of re-reading his “I have a dream” speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC in 1963. But I often also refer to his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* written months before because it was directed to his fellow clergy, clergy who had stated that the civil rights demonstrations in Birmingham were “untimely,” and wondered why Dr. King and the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights had not waited: waited for the new mayor’s administration to get settled, waited for negotiations to be arranged, waited for a more convenient season, waited, as Dr. King writes in his response: waited for those in power “who live by a mythical concept of time” “to set the timetable for another man’s freedom.”

Procrastination can also be convenient. A “wait and see” attitude can also preserve the status quo. Putting things off can keep us safely in the cocoon of inaction. Holding back, remaining on the sidelines, waiting to see what others do and how they will be affected, is sometimes a prudent course; but as Dr. King quoted, “justice too long delayed is justice denied.” It’s one thing to put off cleaning out the garage; quite another to remain silent or to wait and see what happens in the face of oppression. In lamenting the sideline standing of white moderate clergy in his letter, Dr. King wrote: “More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.”

Now, certainly, our hesitation to become involved in the issues of our day in no way compares to Jesus’ momentary hesitation before providing an entire wedding feast with the wine they needed for the rest of the celebration, except in this way: the amazing power that was unleashed when Jesus stepped forward and walked over to those stone water jars, and the amazing power that is unleashed when we, in faith, call upon God for guidance and strength and we step forward and walk over to the places and the people who need filling.

Pastor Ernest Hess writes that although Jesus acted freely, with divine sovereignty, the text implies that his mother’s statement of human need—“They have no wine”—*did* influence the timing of this hour, suggesting that this combination, this partnership of an earthly mother with a divine father, this co-working of humanity and divinity together *can* influence the course

of events.

Many of us have heard stories or may have experienced it ourselves when, seemingly out of nowhere, we feel a nudge from God that sends us in a direction we never imagined. But, more often than not, it seems that nudge, that subtle answer, that gentle, sometimes almost imperceptible guidance comes *in response* to *our* prodding *God*: through prayer, through exasperation turned heavenward, through our cries for help. Many, many times it is our stating the need to God, just as Jesus' mother did. They have no wine. I lost my job. My mother has cancer. My child is drifting. The drugs aren't working. God, there's been a devastating earthquake.

And it is still an unexplained mystery. God, what on earth are you waiting for? And our faith tells us that yes, our prayers are answered, but yet, we cannot recognize the answer. Or maybe God's hour has not yet come.

But *our* hour *has* come. And, unlike God Almighty, our hours are limited. And *we* have been given a commandment, not just a little prodding, not just a mild statement of need, a commandment to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves, and four gospels' worth of Jesus' instructions, beginning in this gospel of John with his mother's words, "Do whatever he tells you."

We can find humor in our procrastination of checkbook balancing or file maintenance, but we have a planet that's melting, millions without enough food or water, millions more living under unspeakable oppression, and people in our own country, despite the courage of civil rights workers in 1963, who are denied dignity because of their color or language or sexual orientation or age. Let us give ourselves a prod to partner up with God and take that first step and wait no longer.

Make a call. Write a check. Write back to the person who forwarded you that racist e-mail and tell him you don't appreciate receiving them and to take you immediately off his list. Speak out when a Christian leader says publicly that the earthquake in Haiti was their fault and God's punishment. Let's utilize those gifts Paul writes of that have been activated in us by the Spirit—the utterance of wisdom and knowledge, and faith and gifts of healing and working of miracles and prophecy and discernment—let us use them to... Stand up. Rise up. Get fed up. And together let us stop putting off, holding off, and goofing off. There's work to be done. Do whatever he tells you. Amen.

