

All In God's Time
ON THE HOUR

Let us pray: Eternal God, whose strange and saving wisdom and glory were revealed on the cross, as your Word is proclaimed, may we be raised anew to a greater knowledge of your love and hope in Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh. Amen.

“Are we there yet?”

If you've ever taken a trip with kids in the car, you've certainly heard that question — over and over and over again! In 2012, Cambria Suites, a hotel chain, conducted a survey to determine exactly how many times that question is asked on a seven-day family vacation. The results were “Are we there yet?” was asked an average of nine times during seven days. Parents of children six years and younger heard the question thirteen times. I don't know about you, but I'm not sure I trust those survey results. It seems like we used to hear “Are we there yet?” thirteen times before we even got to Harrells!

Years ago, a father wrote to Reader's Digest about a road-trip he took with his little girl. After he heard the dreaded question “Are we there yet, Daddy?” for what seemed like the millionth time, he told his daughter, “I don't want to hear you ask that question again. Don't ask it one more time!” He said there was short time of silence, then he heard her little voice ask, “Daddy, will I still be a little girl when we get there?”

One of the delightful, but very challenging, aspects of traveling to Tabasco, Mexico was the different approach to time. Those of us from the U.S. are so accustomed to going by the clock, but the pace of life in Villahermosa and Comalcalco ran on a different schedule. On one trip when I was the group leader, we had a group member who was very bothered by this cultural difference. One Friday night, we were at a restaurant out in the countryside, about 90 minutes from where we were staying. As we were finishing our meal, we noticed some people setting up musical instruments and clearing what appeared to be a dance floor. Then some teenage girls came out dressed in traditional Tabasquea dresses. I asked our hosts what was going on and found out the dance group was going to perform as soon as the town's mayor showed up. Everyone in our group agreed we ought to stay and see the show.

Time went by and everything was in place for the dancing, but there was no mayor. When we asked what time the show would begin, we were told, “In a few minutes.” Our group member, very impatient and worried about the 90 minute trip back to Comalcalco, kept pestering me about what time the show would begin. I finally started making up times to tell her — “It will start at 9:00 p.m.” I said (although I had no idea). That seemed to satisfy her, until 9:00 p.m. came and went. When she came

back again and said they were late, I made up another time. Eventually the mayor showed up, we enjoyed the show, and we made it back to Comalcalco that night!

“Are we there yet, Jesus?” That is a question that seems to be lurking in the background of John’s gospel. There is certainly a sense of timing at play in the gospel, introduced in the very first verse (“In the beginning was the Word . . .”) and carried throughout the gospel. When Jesus’ mother told him the wedding hosts had run out of wine, part of his answer was, “My hour has not yet come.” (John 2:4) That phrase (or its variation, “My time has not yet come . . .”) pops up regularly in the first half of John’s gospel.

* In chapter 7, not even Jesus’ brothers believe in him. They encourage him to go to the Festival of Booths in Judea and do some works so people will believe in him. Jesus answers them, “My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. Go to the festival yourselves. I am not going to this festival, for my time has not yet fully come.” (John 7:1-9) And Jesus stayed up north in Galilee.

* However, Jesus changed his mind and went to the festival in secret. After he taught in the temple, people began to argue whether he was the Messiah or not. As John tells us, “Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come.” (John 7:30)

* On the last day of the festival, Jesus was teaching in the temple treasury. Some people took offense when Jesus talked about God his Father, “but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.” (John 8:20)

I spent way too much time this week trying to come up with a title for today’s sermon. In the overall scheme of things, maybe it doesn’t matter much what the sermon title is each week. However, I try to express in a few words the essence of the sermon. As I read through John’s gospel and thought about Jesus saying, over and over, “My hour has not yet come,” one particular phrase kept playing in my head — “The Hour of Power.”

Perhaps you watched Robert Schuller’s “Hour of Power” church service from the Garden Grove Community Church’s Crystal Cathedral.

In the 1980’s, “Hour of Power” was the most watched religious program in the United States. Robert Schuller began his ministry by preaching from the top of a concession stand at a Los Angeles drive-in theater. In 2013, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange, California bought the Crystal Cathedral for \$49 million.

While Jesus’ hour, which does eventually come in John’s gospel, was *the* “Hour of Power,” it is better described as the “Hour of Glory.” A little more than halfway through John’s gospel, Jesus heads to Jerusalem for the last week of his life. The fact that John devotes almost 48% of his gospel to the final week of Jesus’ life clues us in to the importance of those events for understanding who Jesus is and what Jesus did for us.

* After Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, some Greeks wanted to see Jesus, so they asked Philip and Andrew to introduce them. Jesus told Philip and Andrew, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” (John 12:23)

* Jesus went on to say, “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say — ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” (John 12:27-28)

* John tells us that, even before Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover and the last week of his life, he “knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” (John 13:1)

* On the night before his death, Jesus talked with and prayed for his disciples. He began his prayer for them (and for all of us, for he says, “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word.” [John 17:20]) with these words, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that your 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.” (John 17:1-3)

* And John takes us back to the beginning of time — of God’s time — with Jesus’ next words: “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.” (John 17:4-5)

So, what is this hour that Jesus is awaiting, expecting, and, eventually, accepting? Let’s start with what it is **not**. His “hour” is not something that is going to be forced on him. His “hour” is not something that is rushed. His “hour” is not something other people can bring about through their own actions. In John’s gospel, that’s why we read verses such as, “Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come” and “No one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.”

Jesus’ answer to his mother, Mary, has confounded Bible readers for years. You could hear it as backtalk — “Get off my back, mom!” But that doesn’t fit with our picture of Jesus and his mother. Instead, he might have meant something like “It’s not our concern that they’ve run out of wine. We’re not the hosts.” Furthermore, if Mary was somehow trying to force Jesus’ hand and make him perform some miraculous sign, his answer is pretty clear: “My timeline is not your timeline.” As my friend and colleague, Frances Taylor Gench, writes in her book about encounters with Jesus in John’s gospel, “Jesus’ response may well convey a point worth pondering: his freedom from all human controls, even from the claims of his mother. His actions will be governed only by the hour set by God — the hour of the cross — and as he pointedly states, ‘My hour has not yet come.’”¹

But Jesus’ hour did finally come — the hour when he was crucified for our sins. It’s counterintuitive, and maybe even offensive at first — Jesus’ “hour of glory” in John’s gospel arrives when he spreads his arms wide on the cross and glorifies his Father by being obedient, even unto death. That’s why we can say that Jesus’ hour was “on the hour” — maybe not in chronological terms, but certainly according to God’s time. Remember how the apostle Paul describes Jesus’ death on the cross, in his letter to the Romans. He doesn’t locate the cross on the calendar or the clock. Instead, he lo-

cates the cross in God's *kairos* time: "For while we were still weak, **at the right time** Christ died for the ungodly." (Romans 5:6)

I understand that Dr. Dan's sermon last Sunday was called "Our Days Are Numbered," taken from Psalm 90:10 which says, "The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong." Intellectually we know that is true, but we live much of life fiercely resisting that truth. We know the hour is coming for each of us, but we don't know when the hour will arrive. When you think about it, that's a very good thing. The anxiety that would result would be unbearable.

But, in the meantime, we can live with hope and purpose in all the hours of our lives because Jesus Christ was faithful to the end, even when his hour involved dying on the cross for you and me. After the apostle Paul makes the claim that it was "at the right time" that Christ died for us, he goes on to say, "But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God." (Romans 5:8-9)

The online dictionary definition of the phrase "on the hour" is "If something happens on the hour, it happens every hour at, for example, nine o'clock, ten o'clock, and so on, and not at any number of minutes past an hour."² That's what you call *chronos* time — by the clock, according to the calendar. That's how most of us want life to operate, which is why we get antsy when our carefully coordinated schedules and life plans are interrupted. On that same trip to Tabasco, after the Friday night dance performance, we were scheduled to go worship in a church out in the countryside. On Saturday night we were told that vans would pick us up at the homes where we were staying around town and take us to a central location for the van ride to worship. On Sunday morning, the plan changed. Our hosts took us to the church. Naturally, it took a while for everyone to get there. The group member who had been so "time conscious" on Friday night kept coming to me, pointing at her watch, and fretting that we weren't going to get to church on time. Finally, after several times of trying to answer "Are we going to get there on time?" I finally said, "Do you see that man standing by the van door?" She said, "Yes." I said, "He's the pastor of the church where we are going to worship today. He doesn't look particularly concerned, does he? So maybe we don't need to worry." Eventually everyone showed up, we rode out in the country to the church, and found the congregation singing hymns as they waited for us. Then, at the right time, even though it wasn't "on the hour" according to the watch, we began to worship God together. And it was good.

Let us rejoice that Jesus was faithful to the end and completed his work "on the hour" according to God's time and not our time. Let us dedicate ourselves to living into God's time. Near the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul gives the believers some good advice about how to live in their times, advice that, because we're not there yet, still holds true for you and me in the hours, days, weeks, months, and years of our lives: "Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far

gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” (Romans 13:11-12)

***Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, we place our trust in you.
Help us also to believe in the glory you have revealed
as we look expectantly toward the fullness of the future you bring. Come,
Lord Jesus. Amen.***

NOTES

¹Frances Taylor Gench, Encounters with Jesus: Studies in the Gospel of John (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), p. 11.

²“Definition of ‘on the hour’” at www.collinsdictionary.com.